



# **Peace River Paddling Guide**

**Researched and Written by Teresa Griffith**

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**The condition of a river is always changing. This guide is meant as a rough guide only.  
Please use all caution when paddling. You paddle at your own risk.**



## **Author's Forward**

In the summer of 2010, I had the unique opportunity and responsibility of paddling 800 km on the Peace River in order to write this guide for GeoTourism Canada. I planned to do it in two sections: the northern reach, from the town of Peace River to Fort Vermilion first, and later in the season, the upstream portion, from Hudson's Hope to Peace River. On July 8, with 10 days of food, I set out in a 17-foot Prijon Kodiak kayak to paddle to Fort Vermilion. I am an experienced kayaker but I had never taken on a trip so long, solo. Excitement and nerves filled my stomach the morning my trip began; as I paddled, the nerves faded, but the excitement didn't. I also felt incredibly lucky to be doing this as my job.

It was an incredible experience! I enjoyed the solitude and serenity of paddling and camping every day. The valley and river are beautiful, and striking scenery met me with every bend. By day five, I was noticing some pain in my right shoulder, from overcompensating in wind and steering too aggressively. I had to learn patience and had to let the current carry me a little off-course if necessary – to surrender to it, so to speak. I improved my stroke technique and was more mindful of my every move in order to save my joints any additional stress. My shoulder was not in very much pain, but I knew I had to be careful. I wasn't ready to give up yet. By the afternoon of day six, after bucking a strong headwind and

sitting out an intense thunderstorm, both shoulders were unhappy. On the morning of day seven, my shoulders started feeling better, but I nevertheless decided to end my trip at Tompkins Landing, in order to prevent any serious damage. I'd done 300 km of solo kayaking in six and a half days.

A few weeks later, I picked up where I left off, paddling from Tompkins to Fort Vermilion, experiencing what some said were the lowest water levels on the Peace in 70 years. The ferry at Tompkins was moored on the east side and considered out-of-order due to the shallow water. I dodged gravel bars continually and even saw the river bed in some places – where the steep shores met the river nearly perpendicularly, the river bottom was exposed. It slowed me down, but I successfully reached Fort Vermilion; my heart sang when I saw that picturesque and historic village on the bank!

A month later, in mid-September, a friend and I canoed from Hudson's Hope to the town of Peace River (375 km). Water levels fluctuated wildly, and we had warm days, cool days, and crisp nights. We cruised over boulders lying deep in crystal clear waters – a new experience for me, as the waters had always been quite opaque before. We saw spectacular cliffs and beautiful creek-valleys. We ran aground and portaged after picking the wrong channel in one spot. We reached new lows in personal hygiene, as it was warmer to just keep the clothes on (including toques) than wash our hair. We had a spectacular adventure!

I did my best to make waypoints, notes, photos and



observations along the way. In order to make notes while on the water, I used a small audio recorder. I spoke into it, describing what I saw or wanted to make a note of, often while getting a GPS waypoint. I made notes in the evenings, pored over maps and renamed waypoints. It wasn't always possible while paddling to go all the way to shore to take a waypoint for a possible campsite, but waypoints in the river combined with my description should enable anyone to find those unique spots. After collecting and poring over the data, notes, and the memories, this paddling guide was born. I hope it opens doors for you to enjoy the beauty of this wilderness river as I did.



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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the following people and agencies for their help in answering specific questions for the guide. Every one of them freely gave of their time, knowledge and stories, and I appreciate it very much.

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### ***About the Author***

Teresa Griffith is a renaissance woman and owner/operator of Flow North Paddling Company. Her interest in history, geology, and geography come together in this guide, creating an informative resource for all river users — everything you need to know to take a trip on the beautiful Peace River.



***Peace River Paddling Guide***

## **Introduction to the Guide**

### ***A Joyous Escape***

My paddle glides into the water  
Smoothly, silently,  
And propels me just a little farther.  
The air is still and the water like polished glass.  
I cannot hear a sound,  
Except a gentle gurgle from a stray current.  
The river carries me invariably  
Toward my destination,  
But I feel I won't be ready to leave her loveliness,  
Peace, and solitude  
When I get there.  
Every moment a perfect one,  
Every stroke a meditation,  
I discover trust and joy  
On the waters of the Peace.

-T. Griffith

The Peace River. Before settlers and pioneers, the First Nations people and intrepid fur traders plied the swift waters of the Peace for hunting and trading. The first white men to see its shores were men of the Northwest Company, and the first trading post was



established by Charles Boyer in 1788 near the mouth of the Boyer River, 7 km downstream from present-day Fort Vermilion. For Sir Alexander Mackenzie, it was a vital path to the Pacific; he and his crew of 9 men went upstream from Fort Chipewyan in the fall of 1792 all the way to a spot near the mouth of the Smoky River, Fort Fork, where they wintered. The following year, they pushed upstream through the waters of the Peace as far as possible on their way to the west coast. They reached tidal waters after a mere 72 days of travelling – canoeing, portaging, and canoeing some more – and returned to Fort Fork only 32 days later, covering the reach from the rapids near Hudson's Hope, BC to Fort Fork in just 3 days! This guide will take you from Hudson's Hope, BC to Fort Vermilion, AB, for a journey of 812 km in 24 days, all downstream.

### ***Character of the River***

The Peace River, or Unjaga as it was called in Alexander Mackenzie's time, was the freeway before there was pavement. Although you and I might feel like it's “the long way,” it was by far the quickest way to cross this vast country of ours before there were roads and rails. Bushwacking is difficult and slow, and as you walk, you must carry everything you need, up and down slopes, around swamps, and then, when you meet them, across creeks and rivers. It's easier to take the river, even upstream. Although, in winding across the land, they might go twice the distance, rivers provide a path of less resistance when compared to thick bush.

### ***Peace River Paddling Guide***

The Peace River is an old one; it has carved its way out of bedrock and glacial till for thousands of years. On its western reaches, the banks are generally 200 m high, but at Fort Vermilion, they are only 70 m. You'll see some spectacular cliffs and eroded hills, many loaded with fossils. Remember, take pictures of what you find and make a note of where, but never remove a fossil from the site you found it. If it's particularly spectacular, notify the palaeontologists at the Royal Tyrell Museum of your find.

Altogether, you'll paddle through bedrock formations from the upper and lower Cretaceous period, specifically the Albian (lower, or early Cretaceous) and Cenomanian (upper Cretaceous), 93 to 112 million years ago. The oldest rocks are those near Hudson's Hope, and for about the first 130 km of your trip, the rocks will get younger. A few kilometres after Dunvegan, the bedrock will start getting older again, i.e. the river incises into older rock. The layers are not as clear and tidy as a layer cake, but this is true in general. Much of the bedrock is marine shale, from dark grey to light grey, or siltstone, and later on, you will start to see more sandstone, conglomerate rock, and concretions – huge round rocks found within sandstone bedrock.

A river is constantly changing. The conditions I describe in this guide could be quite different from those you encounter. Gravel and sandbars gradually move and change. The river doesn't freeze over completely, but in parts of the river that do (the river generally remains open year-round upstream of Taylor, BC, a result of the dams upstream) ice can scour the banks and push piles of gravel



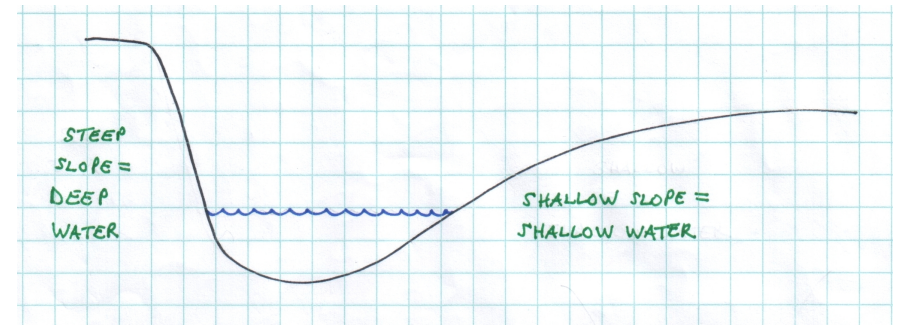


during breakup. If water levels are high, you may not see many gravel bars, but if they are low, you'll see and dodge plenty of them. Water levels can increase due to water released from the dams upstream as well as rainwater, snowmelt, and storm surges. A downpour hundreds of kilometres away can affect the river level if it happens anywhere within the watershed of the river. A paddler must always be vigilant of changing conditions, both in water level and weather.

Whenever you stop and get out of your boat, even just for a quick break, make sure you tie it up to something – a large rock, a tree, a clump of shrubs – or even make a pile of rocks to weigh the rope down if nothing else. It is good to pull the boat out of the water, but it isn't necessary. It **IS** necessary to tie it to something that won't move. **Consider this the most important thing you do** when you get out of your boat. The waterline can change vastly overnight, and the variation is more extreme the closer you are to the two dams. It's common for the water to go up or down by 4 feet (1.2 m), and can even change 10 feet (3 m), within the first 150 km of Hudson's Hope. One long-time resident along the river (near Carcajou) said he's seen the water come up 10-12 feet in ~10 hours because of the dams and rain combined. Many careless paddlers have awoken to find their canoe gone, carried away by rising waters. On most reaches of the Peace, this will mean a steep climb and a *very* long walk to get help. Even at lunch, leaving your canoe unattended and untied is foolhardy; a passing jet boat's wake could be enough to dislodge it.

### ***Peace River Paddling Guide***

Like all rivers, the speed and character of the current changes with the overall volume of water that is flowing. Higher water levels mean faster water in general. The current also changes as you encounter widening or narrowing sections, deepening or shallowing. Surface waves will often help you guess what's going on underneath, but wind can make it trickier. The river is nearly



always deepest along the outside of a curve, as rocks and sand tend to get deposited on the inside of the curve by boundary layer cross currents, called secondary flow, that roll them along the bottom of the riverbed and up the shallow slope toward the shore (see guide #7 for more information). The Peace also tends to build up gravel bars and islands right in the middle. The deepest channels are usually along the steepest shore – just imagine that the shore extends its visible slope down into the water. The result is that to find the fastest, deepest water, you often have to take the longest path around a curve, but if water levels are low, it's worth it. **Always be alert** as this is a general rule and there are exceptions. Always respect the power of the current.



## Jet Boat Races

Recreation on the Peace River is enjoyed by many people, especially near the population centres along the river. As such, you'll have to share the river. Most power boaters are quite polite in slowing down, giving canoes/kayaks space, and some even stop to chat.

The Peace River Jet Boat Races are generally held on a Saturday and Sunday in July each year. If possible, plan to paddle the section of the river between Dunvegan and the DMI bridge north of Peace River on a weekday (guides 10, 11, 12 and part of 13). If you plan to follow this field guide precisely, if you start in Hudson's Hope on a Sunday or Monday, you'll be safe, otherwise, you may have to:

- adjust your campsite locations by paddling more or less some days,
- spend an extra day in camp somewhere, or
- paddle very early or late in the day to avoid the jet boat traffic.

As you plan your trip, there are several ways you can find out when the races are:

- call the Peace River Tourist Information Centre at 780-624-2044
- check the Peace River Boating Association page on Facebook
- check the town of Peace River's website ([www.peaceriver.ca](http://www.peaceriver.ca))

You should take care **not** to interfere with the jet boat races; the boats can reach speeds up to 190 km/h and the boat traffic

would **not** be safe.

In 2011, the Outlaw Eagle Manufacturing World Jet Boat Marathon is taking place in Canada. The Peace River portion is scheduled for July 3 & 4, 2011. On July 3, the boats will be racing a circuit from Deer Island (near the Smoky River confluence) to a point north of the bridges. The races start at 1 pm, so begin at sunrise if you must paddle this section on July 3, 2011. On July 4, the race is between Peace River downtown and Watino, on the Smoky River, so you could probably start your trip north (guide #13) on that day (use the boat launch near 84 Ave if it's too hectic at River Front Park).

You have a unique opportunity to paddle a river that has been affected by industry. Hydroelectric dams create an unnatural environment, yet it is still beautiful and rugged. If BC Hydro's plans for a third dam at Site C are approved, the river will change again. This guide takes you through the section of the river that will be flooded if/when the dam construction begins – from Hudson's Hope to the Moberly River confluence about 78 km downstream. Once the construction begins, some areas will be off-limits, and once the river is flooded behind the dam – a process estimated to take only 1 to 2 months – those areas will never be the same. Much of Bear Flat will be flooded, for example, and “the Gates” will be much less dramatic underwater. The Peace Canyon, historical “Ne Parle Pas” rapids, homesteads, trappers' cabins, whole native villages and much of the Parsnip and Finlay Rivers are lost forever at the bottom of the reservoirs of the dams already built.

## Using This Guide

Paddling is such an incredible way to enjoy nature, reconnect with your loved ones, and experience true peace and quiet in our otherwise hectic lives. Before you can get away, however, some planning is required, and the more you do, the smoother your trip will go. This guide is meant to help you plan, provide information and advice, and give practical suggestions for anyone wishing to paddle the Peace River. It is by no means comprehensive. Descriptions of gravel or sand bars should not be taken to be overly precise, as these structures are always shifting and changing. This guide was written in 2010.

The following information is given for each guide:

Name of River Section	Starting Point to Ending Point
Paddling Time	estimated from the distance, using speeds of 5 km/h to 10 km/h
Paddling Distance	estimated distance of the most likely, most direct paddling path
Rapids (Class number)	class of rapids, if any
Portage	distance and difficulty of portages, if any
Typical speed of current on this section	taken from a GPS unit while drifting
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	if cell phones are likely to work, and where the best signal might be found
Appeal to Families & Children	one sentence summary of the highlights in this section as they relate to families
Appeal to People with passion for topic	one sentence summary of the highlights in this section

Scenic Appeal of River Section	how beautiful this section is, 1 to 5 stars (★★★★★)
Possible as a day-trip?	“Yes” if there is road access at both start and end points, otherwise, “No.”
NTS maps required for this section	list of 1:250,000 maps required (with 1:50,000 in brackets)

In the written portion of this guide, I generally refer to things as “river left” and “river right” meaning on the left or right shore as you go downstream. I may also refer to things as upstream or downstream, and use cardinal points. I indicate most locations by using approximate kilometre distance marks, starting from Hudson’s Hope for guides 1-12 and thereafter, starting from the town of Peace River. The distances were obtained by measuring the path on the river using Google Earth. I then marked 10-km intervals on my paper topo maps. From there, I estimate or measure the other distances in between. I’ve marked the maps in the guide in the same manner, for consistency.

You’ll find a list of possible campsites after the main description, along with a list of emergency road access. This latter section is meant to give you an idea of how you could get off the water in an emergency – walking up a rough road, even a bumpy quad trail, is easier than bushwacking. If you have a cell signal or a sat phone, you could also direct someone to pick you up using these roads, but again, not all roads/trails have been test-driven and I cannot guarantee they will be passable.

Before you depart, you may like to check the current water



flow. The Alberta Government maintains water monitoring stations throughout the province, and this is the link to the real-time data: <http://www.environment.alberta.ca/apps/basins/default.aspx>

GPS waypoints can be downloaded in gpx format to enable you load them into your GPS device. You can then see them on the display and use the various functions of the unit, such as distance and bearing to waypoint. The waypoints are given in the order they are encountered (downstream), and named as “D##P##” meaning day-number point-number. Some waypoints were taken standing on the very spot, and others were taken from the river to show where you can see a certain cliff or alongside a possible campsite. If you are only downloading the waypoints for certain guides, you may want to download those preceding and following the section you intend to paddle, just in case. For example, load the waypoints for guides 9-13 into your GPS unit if you plan on paddling guides 10-12.

### ***Other notes***

Remember when you drive into BC to move your watch one hour back. Although *technically* the boundary between the time zones is farther northwest, Fort St. John and Hudson's Hope are one hour behind Alberta.

### **Interesting websites:**

- Regarding river channel and island formation (fluvial geomorphology): <http://geofroth.posterous.com/a-way-to-think->

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[about-channel-patterns](#)

- Biography of Alexander Mackenzie:

<http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?BioId=36643>

## **Safety and Wilderness Camping**

### ***Safety***

Always keep safety in mind. Even as you plan your trip and pack your gear, think about safety in everything. Imagine the worst thing that could happen and then plan for it. Once you have a plan, you can forget about it happening and have fun.

Make sure all your safety gear is in good working order. Go through everything and make sure it's serviceable before you reach the water's edge. Standing on shore with your boat loaded is not the best time to discover that your first aid kit has been raided by the kids and doesn't have anything but large triangular bandages left in it.

Transport Canada requires that you have:

- a personal flotation device for each person
- a sound signalling device (I recommend a whistle on each PFD)



- at least 15 metres of buoyant rope (make sure there is NO risk of entanglement if you should capsize. Throw bags are good for this.)
- a bailer or manual pump capable of pumping water over the side of the boat
- a paddle
- a light if paddling at night or in times of reduced visibility, such as fog

The above applies to human-powered craft less than 6 m (~20') in length. For more information, please visit Transport Canada's website: <http://tc.gc.ca/eng/marinesafety/menu.htm>

Make sure you are not attempting to paddle outside of your skill level. Although this is a class I river, it is best if you have experience paddling on moving water before attempting this trip.

## ***Hazards & Precautions***

### **Hazard: Drowning**

#### **Precaution:**

Always wear your personal flotation device (PFD) when on the water or near the water's edge. Make sure it fits properly and wear it snug.

Never try to stand up in a deep current. Don't even try to put your feet down to see how deep it is – undercurrents can pull you

down and drown you. Float on your back, keep your feet up and pointed downstream, and swim for shore. Only try to stand up when you can feel the bottom with your bottom.

Ropes can be a significant tangling and drowning hazard. Make sure they are kept bundled or stowed so they won't uncoil if you capsize. Throw bags are good for this.

Always pitch your tent as high above the water as possible to avoid rising water and potential panic in the night.

### **Hazard: Injury**

#### **Precaution:**

Always think before acting when paddling or setting up camp and keep your actions careful and deliberate. Bring a well-stocked first aid kit in a waterproof container and learn first aid before you go. Know the signs for heatstroke and hypothermia.

Create a "second aid kit." This includes things like reusable warming gel-packs, pain killers or other medication, tensor bandages, and extra matches. Be extra careful around your campfire and/or cookstove to avoid burns. Take a GPS tracker such as a SPOT device or satellite phone so that you can request help if needed.

### **Hazard: Illness**

#### **Precaution:**

Make sure you are healthy before you start your trip. For example, don't start a trip if you feel a flu coming on. Bring all

prescription medications in waterproof containers packed in several places (don't put all your eggs in one dry-bag)! To avoid getting giardia (beaver fever), never drink untreated water and make sure to follow the directions on your water treatment system carefully. Bring extra water treatment tablets in case. Be sure to drink enough water to avoid dehydration.

### **Hazard: Getting separated from your boat**

#### **Precaution:**

Prevent capsizes by:

- never paddling beyond your ability
- being alert to changing conditions when paddling (ie. upcoming gravel bar or rapids)
- communicating clearly with your partner when embarking and disembarking, and help your paddle partner get in or out of the canoe/kayak.

Prevent your boat from floating away by always tying it up to a good anchor (tree, large driftwood or rock) whenever you get out of it, even for a short break.

In case you do capsize and lose your boat or some of your gear:

- Always have the following items on you (in a pocket or attached to your PFD): matches/lighter/flint, SPOT GPS or Sat phone (in waterproof bag if necessary), multi-tool or army knife, and water treatment tablets.
- Always know where you are. Keep track of your progress on your map. Even if you lose your map, you should know where

the nearest town or road is.

- Always wear shoes while in the boat, so that if you have to walk out, you can.
- Never pack difficult-to-replace things with you (like a passport). If you must bring it, keep it on you at all times.
- Never pack **all** your food in one place.

### **Hazard: Getting lost**

#### **Precaution:**

Make sure you have maps, such as 1:250,000 NTS topo maps, for the areas you are paddling (in addition to the maps in this guide). This will also help you find the nearest road access if you need to get help. Keep track of where you are as you paddle. You should know how to read a topo map; when the topo lines are close together, the slope is steep, when spaced apart, it is gradual. Creeks are clearly seen on a topo map by the valley they create as they incise (erode) their way to the main river. Ideally, you should know how to use a map and compass to navigate yourself to a desired destination through the bush if necessary — if you cannot, always follow a landmark, like a creek or road. At minimum, you should know how to read a map and find your location on it using GPS coordinates (assuming you bring a GPS along). Always bring more than enough spare batteries for your GPS. Leave the details of your trip with a responsible person, so that if you are overdue, that person will call the RCMP to initiate a search and rescue operation.



## **Hazard: Forest Fire**

### **Precaution:**

If you make a campfire, always do so on a non-flammable surface such as rock or sand, not the forest floor. Build your fire along the river (not in the trees) and keep it as small as possible for your purpose (warmth, light, cooking, etc). Be aware of what the forest fire hazard rating is before you leave on your trip, and also use common sense – if the duff (leaves, twigs, decaying organic matter) on the forest floor is very dry, be extra vigilant of where sparks land or don't build a fire at all. Chronic lack of rain and/or hot weather can raise the fire hazard rating to extreme levels in just a few days.

Be absolutely sure that your fire is out. If the duff is a little dry, chase any sparks that travel and douse them if necessary. When extinguishing your campfire, pour water on it, stir it with a stick and then pour more water on it. Make sure the coals are cold.

If you see a forest fire or smell smoke while on shore, stay calm. If it appears the fire is definitely headed your way, get all your gear into your boat and get on the water as quickly as possible. The middle of the river is probably the safest place, or you may decide to cross to the opposite side of the river. If the fire appears to be downstream, prepare a wet cloth or towel to breathe through before getting in your canoe. If you are experiencing thick smoke, breathe through a damp piece of cloth. If there is active fire fighting taking place, follow the instructions any fire fighters give you. If you see aircraft flying low, do your best to signal them by waving your arms or using a signalling mirror.

## **Hazard: Bear Encounter or Attack**

### **Precaution:**

Your priority in bear country is to **avoid an encounter altogether**. Set your tent up away from where you cook your food and tie up your boat. Make sure all food is stowed each night and don't bring any food or other smelly items (like deodorant or toothpaste) into the tent. If you spill food on your clothes, wipe it off immediately and if you are worried it will smell, change clothes and wash the soiled item or put it in a bag and leave it in the boat. **Bears are attracted to campsites primarily because of smells.** Keep all your food in bear-proof containers, thick-walled dry bags or blue barrels. Pasta and rice, which has little smell, can go in thick-walled dry bags while chocolate, produce, smelly wrappers, garbage or baggies should all go in a bear-proof container. I recommend the “Backpacker's Cache” made of black PVC plastic. You can hang your food from a tree limb, put it inside kayak hatches, or simply keep it on shore.

Keep bear spray and/or bangers in your tent at night and make sure you know how to use them. You may also want to mark your territory by sprinkling household ammonia around your tent to keep animals at bay. Besides smelling like super-potent urine, ammonia is one of the only smells bears won't associate with food. One sure-fire technique to prevent bears from messing with your gear is to cover it with a spare tarp and then place a couple of small containers filled with ammonia under the edge. The ammonia vapours will fill the airspace under the tarp and any curious bears

who get a whiff of that will head for the hills!

Be sure to make plenty of noise whenever you come ashore. Announce your intentions out loud to let the bears know you are there, giving them time to run away before you get close. Try loudly projecting “hello bears! I'm coming up the hill now, so if there's anybody there, you can run and hide now...” Learn how to tell the difference between Black and Grizzly bears.

If you see a bear (and it sees you), stay calm. See if it is agitated or just surprised. Determine what type of bear it is. Try not to corner it – always give it a way out. Speak to the bear, avoid eye contact, make yourself larger than you appear, and slowly, calmly, back away. If it charges you, stand your ground. You may need to become more aggressive or defiant or use your bear spray or bear bangers. Most attacks are defensive, but if it becomes predatory, you should change your strategy. For black bears, try to get away or keep fighting – show you are not easy prey. For grizzlies, it is better to lie down and play dead.

Any bears you see swimming are no threat; they cannot and will not attack you while swimming. That doesn't mean you should approach them. Give them space (and take lots of pictures).

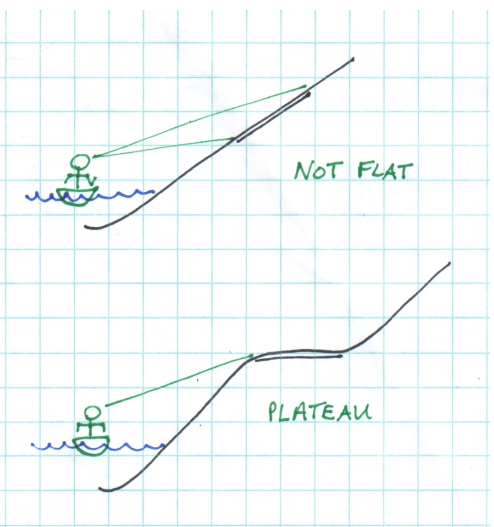
### ***Backcountry Camping***

This is a wilderness river. It is recommended that you have experience wilderness camping prior to your trip. You may want to

read some books on wilderness camping, such as *Song of the Paddle* by Bill Mason.

Remember the three basic human needs: food, shelter, and clothing. Bring only the essentials, and once you've checked it all over and packed it, try it out in your boat. Will it all fit, with enough freeboard (space above the waterline on the boat)? If not, reduce it down until it fits. See the Comprehensive Trip Packing List here: <http://flownorth.ca/what-we-offer/planning-your-paddling-trip/> Find small, light items whenever possible. Take the minimum of clothing, but at least one full change of clothes. You can't go wrong with extra socks or underwear. Hygiene items should be few and small; you aren't going to win a beauty pageant!

When looking for a good camping spot, remember that it should be high enough above the water to be safe, and as flat as possible. If you can see the patch of ground you want to put your tent on from the water, it probably isn't flat! If you can see a ridge, it is probably flat beyond. There are a few



places along the river where there are no suitable camping spots for several kilometres, and I have indicated this in the guide.

Most islands provide possible campsites, although I use the word “campsites” loosely. They are not campsites in the sense of public, maintained locales; they are simply places you can camp. Generally, sandy or gravelly islands start out with a gravel bar preceding them (upstream) which gradually gets higher and the slope increases until the downstream end of the island is very steep (sand or mud) with flat campsites on top if you can climb to them. Therefore, about one-third of the way along most islands is the ideal spot to set up camp – before the slope gets too steep or high. The disadvantage to camping on a slope that is too gradual is that you'll walk a mile before you get to bed, going back and forth to and from the tent location, the kitchen location, and the boat. Maybe this doesn't seem like a problem, but if the water level goes down, you'll have to carry your boat a hundred feet or more over rocks to find water again. So, camping on a shallow bank is possible but not ideal. Look for a shore with a little more slope to it, and flat space on top. Be careful when working near the shore not to drop anything in the water, or somewhere it might roll into the water.

You can camp adjacent to private land, as no one owns the water and the shore immediately along it. Just the same, if a private landowner asks you to leave, it is best to do so. Most camp sites recommended in this guide are parks or crown land, and the landowners of all end-point sites have given permission for users of this guide to camp at that site.

## Leave No Trace

Always abide by the Leave No Trace principles:

- **Plan Ahead and Prepare.** A well-planned trip is more likely to leave no trace than an ill-prepared one.
- **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces.** Always minimize trampling of vegetation when camping.
- **Dispose of Waste Properly.** Dig a cathole (toilet) 15-20 cm (6-8”) deep and 10-15 cm (4-6”) in diameter at least 60 m (70 adult paces, or 200 feet) from the river. Bury your toilet paper (or use leaves) and fill the cathole with the original dirt when you are finished.
- **Leave What You Find.** It is illegal to remove cultural artifacts, and highly discouraged to remove rocks, fossils, flowers, etc. Do not build fire rings or crude furniture.
- **Minimize Campfire Impacts.** Don't build a fire when the fire hazard is high. Keep your fire small and don't cut trees, limbs, or bark. Gather wood smaller than your wrist from a wide area. Read more here: <http://www.leavenotrace.ca/principle-minimize-campfire-impacts>
- **Respect Wildlife.** Watch wildlife from afar and remember you are a visitor in their home.
- **Be Considerate of Other Visitors.** If you encounter others, be respectful. Keep noise levels down. Keep your pet under control and stoop and scoop.

Essentially, when you leave your lunch spot or campsite, there should be no evidence that you were there. No garbage, no piles of firewood, no damaged trees, no artificial clearings. Using a cookstove reduces your impact greatly – you won't need to make a fire at all, but if you want one, you can make a small one, just for lingering around. Read more about the Leave No Trace principles here: <http://www.leavenotrace.ca>

Also, when possible, avoid landing/launching your boat in marshy or soft areas. Always leave wildlife alone, and in particular, do not disturb nesting birds you may see along the shore. If you have to go to the bathroom, always do so on shore, never directly into the river.

When walking about, try to use existing trails or walk on surfaces that are most resistant to erosion (rock instead of soil).

## Meals and Snacks

Food is a very personal thing. Most of us can endure a lot of physical discomfort or rugged conditions as long as the food is good. Here are some ideas for meal planning.

**The basics.** Pasta and rice work well for supper, and many soup mixes or flavour packets are easy to pack and will keep for a long time. Add some fish (caught or packaged or smoked), beef jerky, pepperoni, or dried hamburger and you've got supper. For breakfast, oatmeal or granola work well, with powdered milk or rice milk on shorter trips. Lunch is the tricky one – if you don't want to

stop and make a fire or set up a stove, it has to be tasty and filling without requiring cooking. Cheese keeps a long time without refrigeration, although it will sweat. Soft tortillas are good – they keep a long time and you don't have to worry about squishing them (unlike bread). Bring along lots of trail mix for snacks while paddling. The following fresh foods travel well: potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, turnips, apples, oranges and eggs (packed carefully). You can dehydrate foods to make your own meals and snacks. You can bring frozen foods along (in thermal bags) on 2-3 day trips and use them once they have thawed.

**Flavour, flavour, flavour.** Use dehydrated vegetables, spices, sugar and salt to add flavour to your basic food.

**Temperature control.** Use insulated bags to keep foods cool, such as cheese or cucumbers (short trips). Open the insulated bag in the evening to allow a complete air exchange with the cool air. You may be able to use bags of cold water to keep things cool as well.

**Packaging.** Avoid canned items as they take up a lot of space and you have to very thoroughly clean them and then pack the cans/jars out with you. Dried foods are good, but double-bag them to make sure they stay dry. Fish can be purchased in bags instead of cans. Beef jerky is an obvious choice. When packing, measure and re-package foods to minimize the packaging and space they take up.

**Water.** Do not bring bottled water for anything longer than a day trip. Buy water purification tablets or a filtration system and follow the instructions given. Bring extra bottles for processing the



water to make sure you always have lots available, so you do not get dehydrated. Consider bringing electrolytes, such as Gatorade juice crystals, if you will be paddling hard on hot days. Generally, a person requires 2-4 L of water per day (depending on body size and fluid loss).

**Snacks.** Store-bought or home-made trail mixes work well, along with dehydrated apples, apricots, bananas, and any other fruit you care to dry! Nuts, raisins, figs, crackers, carrots, granola bars, pepperoni, cheese, and many other common snacks are great, especially if you re-package them. Be especially careful to keep track of where the snack food is to avoid bear encounters. If you aren't careful, you might accidentally bring a granola bar into the tent in your pocket.

**Fancy menus.** You can bring ingredients such as flour, baking powder, graham wafers, etc., and try your hand at bannock, fruit cobbler or any other food you make at home. You can bake on an open fire or stove using cast-iron pans or other cookers. You are only limited by your preparation time, imagination, and the volume/weight capacity of your boat. There are many books on camp cooking, so I refer you to them if you want a fancier menu.

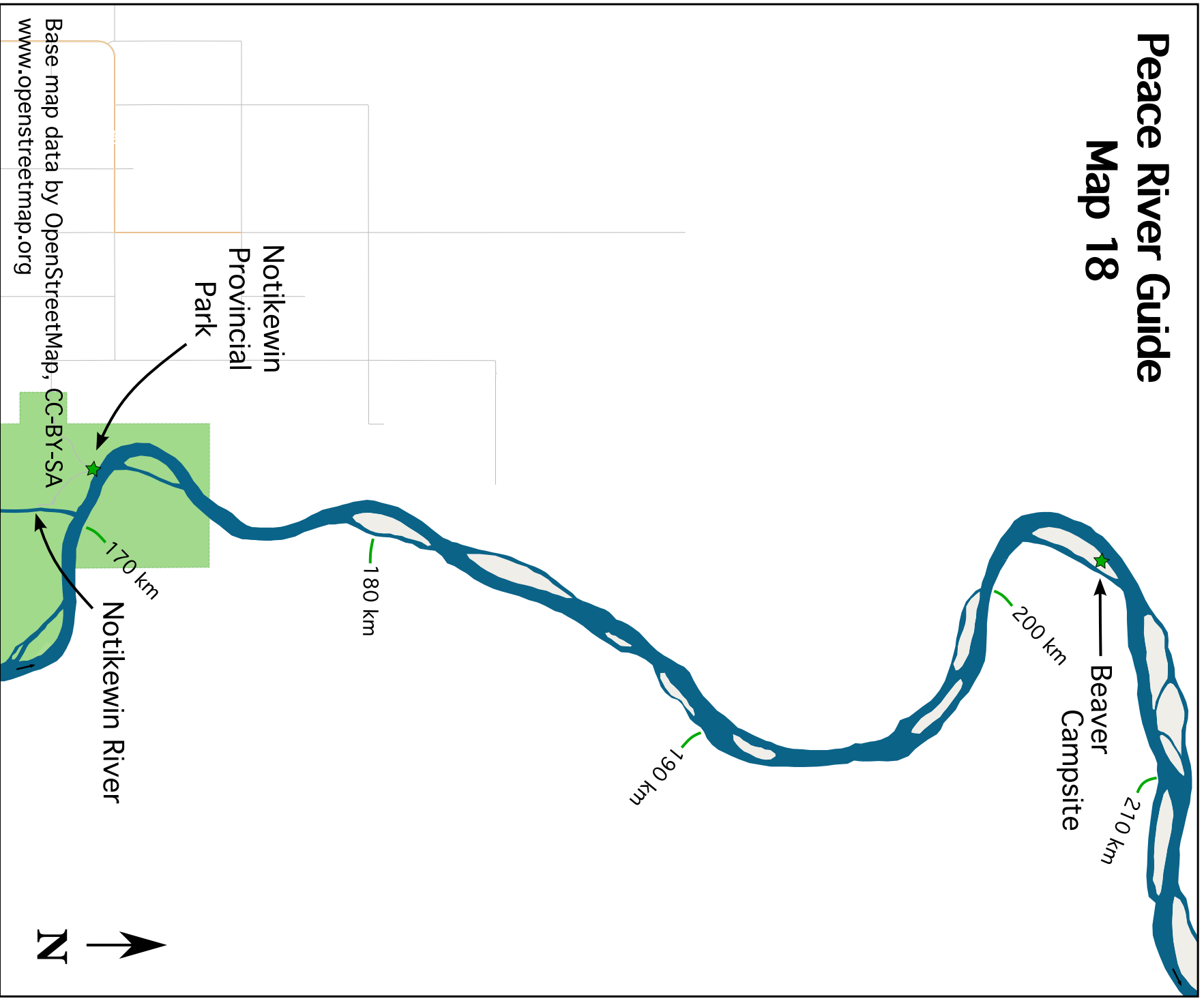
## **Images**

All photos in this section are by Darren Griffith.

All illustrations by Teresa Griffith.

# Peace River Guide

## Map 18



## Guide 18

### Notikewin Provincial Park to Beaver Campsite

Name of River Section	Notikewin Provincial Park to Beaver Campsite	
Paddling Time	3.5 – 7 hrs	
Paddling Distance	33 km (171 – 204 km)	[547 – 580 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids	
Portage	none	
Typical speed of current on this section	4-6 km/hr	
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	none	
Appeal to Families & Children	Paddle away from all that's civilized... this section is day 1 of a 3-day wilderness paddle with no road access.	
Appeal to People with passion for topic	The beautiful valley continues as you paddle deeper into the wilderness.	
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★	
Possible as a day-trip?	No	
NTS maps required for this section	84 F (F/6, F/11)	

When you leave Notikewin Provincial Park today, you leave civilization behind. Within about 10 km, you'll see the very last sign of agriculture on the left bank, and after that, there is no road access and no sign of human interference. The river heads generally north today, with only a couple major bends or curves. There are many

islands spread along the way, many of which provide suitable camping spots.

After leaving Notikewin and paddling the right-hand curve, you'll paddle over a major oil pipeline which runs from Rainbow Lake to Edmonton (waypoint D18P01). The Rainbow Lake oil fields, discovered in 1965, are some of the richest in the province. The pipeline, about 51 cm (20") in diameter, travels about 380 km from Rainbow Lake to a point north of Lesser Slave Lake before turning south to Edmonton. All pipelines have valves periodically, such as at points which cross a river, so that if there was a problem of some sort, the flow could be shut off.

You'll weave your way through the first five islands of the river, passing left of the first one, right of the second one, and so on, taking the main channel each time.

As mentioned in an earlier guide, the east side of the river has no farm land or communities and the west side has some farms along it. At about 185 km, high up on the left bank you can see some odd-looking trees. They are along the edge of the valley, and it looks like the farmer has cleared the land right to the edge. Usually, to prevent erosion, a buffer zone of trees is left between the field and the valley.

Around 186 km, there is a sandbar island that isn't marked on the 1:250,000 map, just before the creek that flows in from the right, so be aware of it and plan to stay to the left. It is visible on the 1:50,000 map, and in fact, it would be a good idea to take a copy of

the F/6 topo map with you for this leg of the trip. If you don't have one, don't worry, just stay alert to the gravel bars.

There is a small island in the middle of the river at about 191 km, which looks passable on either side. As you paddle around the bend at 196 km, weaving your way through the gravel bars, don't get too far to the right, as there's a surprise awaiting you at about 198 km on the left (island).

Just when you least expect it, there's a beautiful, white sandy beach along river left (when the river is low enough). It is gently rippled, and on a sunny day, you simply must not paddle by without stopping to enjoy the sand, sun, and quiet. This is better than a



fancy tropical resort – it's every bit as beautiful, but there's no one else around. The river is quite shallow as you approach, and the sun warms this shallow water, making it a great place for a “swim” or bath. Stay shallow – out of the current – and enjoy the water! With only 33 km to paddle today, spend a little time here and relax.

Shortly after you leave the beach, you'll see a clearing with a cabin on the right, on top of the bank. Around the bend is today's campsite. The left bank is high and deeply incised by two creeks, creating striking scenery. After being on the river for so many days, make sure you don't become blasé about the beautiful scenery around you!

Today's campsite is near 204 km, close to the downstream end of the skinny island coming up on river right. You could camp near the beginning of the island if you prefer, and paddle the extra 2 km tomorrow. The landing is muddy with a few rocks, and there's a grassy plateau beyond. This spot is named after the beavers whose territory I was clearly in. They were slightly alarmed by my presence and water-patrolled by me steadily all evening, and in the morning, too.

*Castor canadensis*' usual habitat is moving water like a creek or small river, and they spend all their time damming the creek to create a pond. They don't actually live in their dam; they make a domed-shaped mud-and-stick lodge, usually near the middle of their pond, which they enter and exit through an underwater entrance. This is the safest place, since beavers are excellent swimmers and most of their predators aren't. Their diet is tree-bark – not fish as some people believe – so their winter food supply comes from trees they've chewed down and then pushed into the mud to submerge them. This way, they can swim under the ice all winter and get the food they've collected. They can swim with sticks in their mouths because they have a second set of lips behind their teeth to keep water out. The dams they build are strictly for water retention, to keep the pond deep enough so it doesn't freeze solid.

But how to dam the Peace River? Obviously, beavers can't. They'll build dams in small channels and dig their lodges into the

side of a muddy river bank. Look for unusual-looking piles of sticks along the bank that look like they've been glued together with mud; that is probably a river beaver's home.

In addition to shaping our landscape by creating new ponds and sloughs, beavers were a key player in shaping our country's history. As European beavers were trapped to near-extinction, the Canadian beaver's fur became the favourite of aristocrats in Europe, sparking the fur trade, a wide-spread and complex commercial operation, and from 1660 to 1870 the fur trade was Canada's *raison d'être* (reason for being). Beavers were trapped all winter, when the fur was the best quality, and then the furs were hauled in canoes by native, white and Métis trappers to trading posts where they received food, supplies, traps, rifles – things that were difficult to make themselves – in exchange. The furs were then compacted into bales, containing about 44 beaver pelts, 12 otters, 5 bears and 6 fishers, and weighing about 90 lbs. These were hauled in birch bark canoes, and later York boats, carried over portages and eventually put on ships headed east to England and France. The furs were widely made into hats – both warm and fashionable. If it wasn't for this abundant rodent, there would have been much less motivation to explore this large, cold country of ours. To this day, beaver fur is still used in clothing made by a few local people, such as moosehide mittens with beaver fur trim.

While beavers are not aggressive and pose no threat to humans, please give any beavers you see a wide berth. Their front



teeth are extremely sharp, long and strong – they chew trees down with them – and a beaver bite would require many stitches.

## START – Notikewin Provincial Park

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Hotchkiss, AB T0H1 2B0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	Manning, AB
County or Municipal District	County of Northern Lights
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	Turn east off Hwy 35 onto secondary Hwy 692 towards Hawk Hills. Go east for 12.5 km, then north for 6.3 km, then east again for 8.2 km until you get to a T-intersection. Turn right. Follow this road for 5 km to the boat launch.
Parking Instructions at Site	Park out of others' way
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	May 15 – Oct 31
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0491020 Northing 6349553
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	57° 17.333' N 117° 8.939' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	269 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual slope

## END – Beaver Campsite

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Keg River, AB T0H 2G0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	Manning, AB
County or Municipal District	County of Northern Lights

## Peace River Paddling Guide

Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting Point	11V Easting 0493414 Northing 6375551
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	57° 31.348' N 117° 6.598' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	265 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual slope to grassy camping area

## Waypoints

D18P01 (pipeline): 57° 19.268' N 117° 7.737' W / 11V Easting 0492234 Northing 6353142

D18P02 (beach): 57° 29.445' N 117° 4.905' W / 11V Easting 0495099 Northing 6372018 / elev 266 m

D18P03 (end point): 57° 31.348' N 117° 6.598' W / 11V Easting 0493414 Northing 6375551 / elev 265 m

## Possible Campsites

- Although no spots were way-pointed specifically, most islands along this stretch have suitable camping spots on them.



## Emergency Road Access

The only emergency road access is a trail coming down the left bank at about 182.5 km, near the upstream end of the island there on river left. Be cautious of gravel pits in the area. In an emergency, one could possibly walk up the pipeline right of way (river left) until it crosses a gravel road. Both these options would be a long walk out.

## Bibliography

Alberta Energy Resources  
Conservation Board (ERCB)

Canadiana [www1.canadiana.org/  
hbc/stories/ preparation1\\_e.html](http://www1.canadiana.org/hbc/stories/preparation1_e.html)

McGill Digital Library  
[digital.library.mcgill  
.ca/nwc/history/ 01.html](http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/nwc/history/01.html)

## Images

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

The beach along the left shore

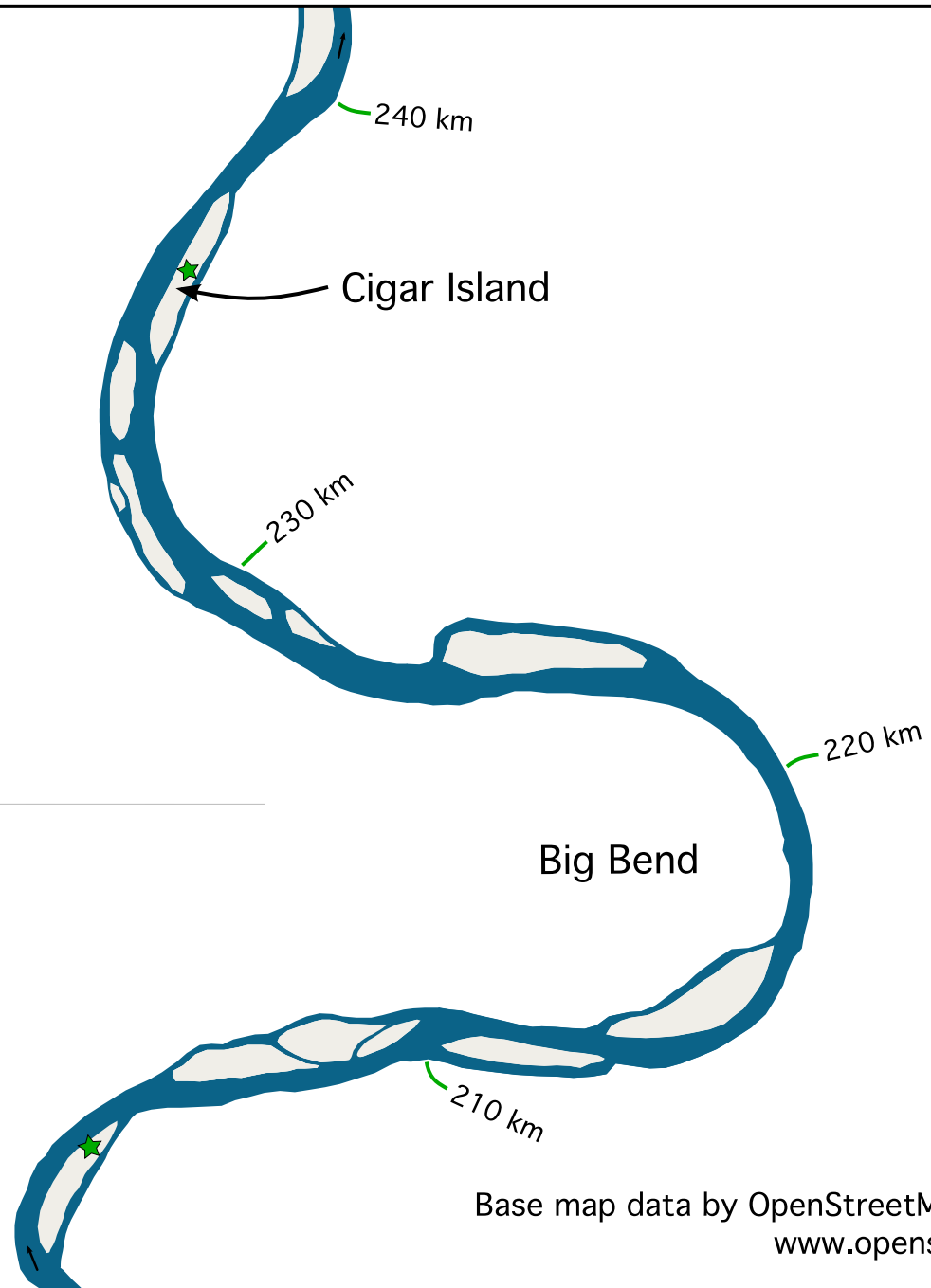
Unnamed creeks make beautiful cuts in the banks

Two of nature's finest *castor canadensis*



# Peace River Guide

## Map 19



Base map data by OpenStreetMap, CC-BY-SA  
[www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org)

## Guide 19

### Beaver Campsite to Cigar Island

Name of River Section	Beaver Campsite to Cigar Island	
Paddling Time	3.5 – 7 hrs	
Paddling Distance	32 km (204 – 236 km)	[580 – 612 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids	
Portage	none	
Typical speed of current on this section	4-6 km/hr	
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	none	
Appeal to Families & Children	If you wanted to get away from it all, congratulations – you did it! Day 2 of a 3-day wilderness paddle.	
Appeal to People with passion for topic	Paddle around the Big Bend today as you enjoy more true wilderness paddling.	
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★	
Possible as a day-trip?	No	
NTS maps required for this section	84 F (F/11)	

The river today shows a slightly different face, showing fewer high banks as you paddle past a huge flat. The river starts meandering more, which it will continue to do to some degree for the remainder of your trip to Fort Vermilion. The main feature of today's paddling is Big Bend, a 15 km-long left hand curve with high banks on the right and a flat, low floodplain, on the left. It is a

beautiful area and the islands among it add to the beauty.

Early on, you'll paddle by three “braided” islands on your left. The next island is more centered (I went to the right). After this island you'll start into the long, gradual Big Bend. The left bank gradually gets lower and the huge flat will begin around 214 km.

As mentioned in a previous guide, the Peace River has an interesting meandering behaviour in this area leading up to and around Carcajou. One bank is high and the other side a flat, alternating as the river flows north. It is essentially “bouncing back and forth” between the two high banks, and one can imagine that at one time, with greatly increased flows, perhaps all the flats were underwater. As the flow decreased, it became more efficient for the river to carve a deeper channel and meander back and forth than maintain a straight, wide, but very shallow, riverbed. This meandering behaviour is also the first sign of the overall gradient of the river decreasing as it approaches the Peace floodplain. The floodplain is very flat and low and starts at Fort Vermilion and stretches east all the way to the Peace-Slave delta.

The last ice age waned from 20,000 until approximately 10,000 years before present. As the glaciers retreated north, they created an “ice dam,” since the drainage basins of northern Alberta empty to the north. (This same phenomena causes floods of the Red River in Manitoba each spring – southern (upstream) parts of the north-flowing river melt and as it flows north and encounters ice that has not melted yet, water backs up behind the ice dam.) The



Laurentide ice sheet along with the Buffalo Head Hills and Clear Hills retained this water, known as Glacial Lake Peace, which extended into BC in the west and as far north as High Level. This is why the surface geology of this area is classified as glaciolacustrine: *glacio* meaning “to do with glaciers” and *lacustrine* meaning “relating to a lake.” At some point around 11,000 years ago, the glacier retreated/melted enough and the lake immediately began to drain to the north – and the Peace River began to flow.



Along the right, steep bank there is visual evidence of erosional slumping in the hillside. For example, you'll see spots that look like small plateaus or terraces. One such spot has actually developed a sag pond about 3-6 m (10-20 feet) above the river level (D19P01). Erosion is always happening along the shores of the river, from landslides which creep or plummet down the hillside to flows where the surface soil behaves like molasses oozing out of a bowl. Researchers studying landslides along the Peace River within the area covered by NTS map 84 C, found 157 landslides from the Holocene period (within the last 12,000 years). There was a recent,

notable one in 1984 which obstructed Highway 2 southeast of the town of Peace River and partially dammed the Heart River — the highway had to be rebuilt. Landslides aside, along the Big Bend, the Peace River is starting to incise a lower layer, the Loon River Formation, known for its dark grey shale and siltstone with concretions (see guide #15 for more on concretions).

A river is in a constant state of erosion and deposition.

Banks are undercut by erosion and small sediments are deposited or rocks moved by secondary currents (see guide #7). This results in complex, ever-changing channel and island evolution.

Around 219 km, you'll see a hunting camp on river right, a little ways up the bank. Waypoint D19P02 is the river location from which to view the camp. A local man owns the camp, often taking American hunters out to find their prize. There is a pond high above the camp and a pipe from the pond provides gravity-pressurized water.

About 1 km past the hunting camp, there is a possible



campsite on a terrace, about the same height as the pond was (river right). It is a little tricky to find, but if you want to stop here, it is a very nice, unique spot, with a view of the river from above (D19P03). It would make a great camping spot.

As you come out of Big Bend, plan to stay to the left of the island tucked into the right shore. On the topo maps, it looks possible to pass on the right, but the downstream channel appeared to be blocked by gravel bars. I found an additional island/gravel bar around 227 km that was not indicated on the 1:250,000 topo maps, but of course, gravel bars are always changing.

Between 223 – 228 km, beware of winds; this east-west reach is long enough to really build up waves if there's a west wind. Do not battle wind beyond your threshold. Stop and rest if you feel tired, because if you get too exhausted, you risk injury and the inability to respond to an emergency if needed.

The path through the islands at the beginning of the right curve is fairly obvious – the first two (only one is shown on the 1:250,000 topo maps) are near the right bank and the long skinny one and the oval one are close to the left shore. The next island, a long, skinny one, is your destination for today. My research didn't uncover a name for this island, so I have dubbed it Cigar Island. The main river channel passes the island on the left; look for the camping spot about half way down, on river right.

## START – Beaver Campsite

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Keg River, AB T0H 2G0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	Manning, AB
County or Municipal District	County of Northern Lights
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting Point	11V Easting 0493414 Northing 6375551
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	57° 31.348' N 117° 6.598' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	265 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual slope to grassy camping area

## END – Cigar Island

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Keg River, AB T0H 2G0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	Manning, AB
County or Municipal District	County of Northern Lights
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0494797 Northing 6389854
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	57° 39.071' N 117° 5.285' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m

Altitude of Site in meters	264 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual slope

## Waypoints

D19P01 (the pond): 57° 32.664' N 116° 55.385' W / 11V Easting 0504604 Northing 6377991 / 260 m

D19P02 (hunting camp): 57° 34.231' N 116° 55.282' W / 11V Easting 0504723 Northing 6380860 / 263 m

D19P03 (terrace campsite): 57° 34.741' N 116° 55.557' W / 11V Easting 0504428 Northing 6381844 / elev 263 m

D19P04 (possible campsite): 57° 36.934' N 117° 5.525' W / 11V easting 0494499 Northing 6385915 / elev 259 m

**D19P05 (end point):** 57° 39.071' N 117° 5.285' W / 11V Easting 0494797 Northing 6389854 / elev 264 m

## Possible Campsites

- At 220 km, on river right. Look for a small, flat clearing on a plateau about 4 m (13 feet) up the bank. There are some large spruce, and the best tent spot is between two patches of silver berry (wolf willow) (D19P03).
- At 232, on river right, mid-way across from the long skinny island on the left (D19P04).

## Emergency Road Access

None

## Peace River Paddling Guide

## Bibliography

Inventory of Holocene Landslides, Peace River Area, Alberta (NTS 84C) M.R. Davies (University of Alberta), R.C. Paulen (Alberta Energy and Utilities Board/Alberta Geological Survey), and A.S. Hickin (British Columbia Ministry of Energy and Mines), 2005

## Images

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

Looking downstream on the Big Bend

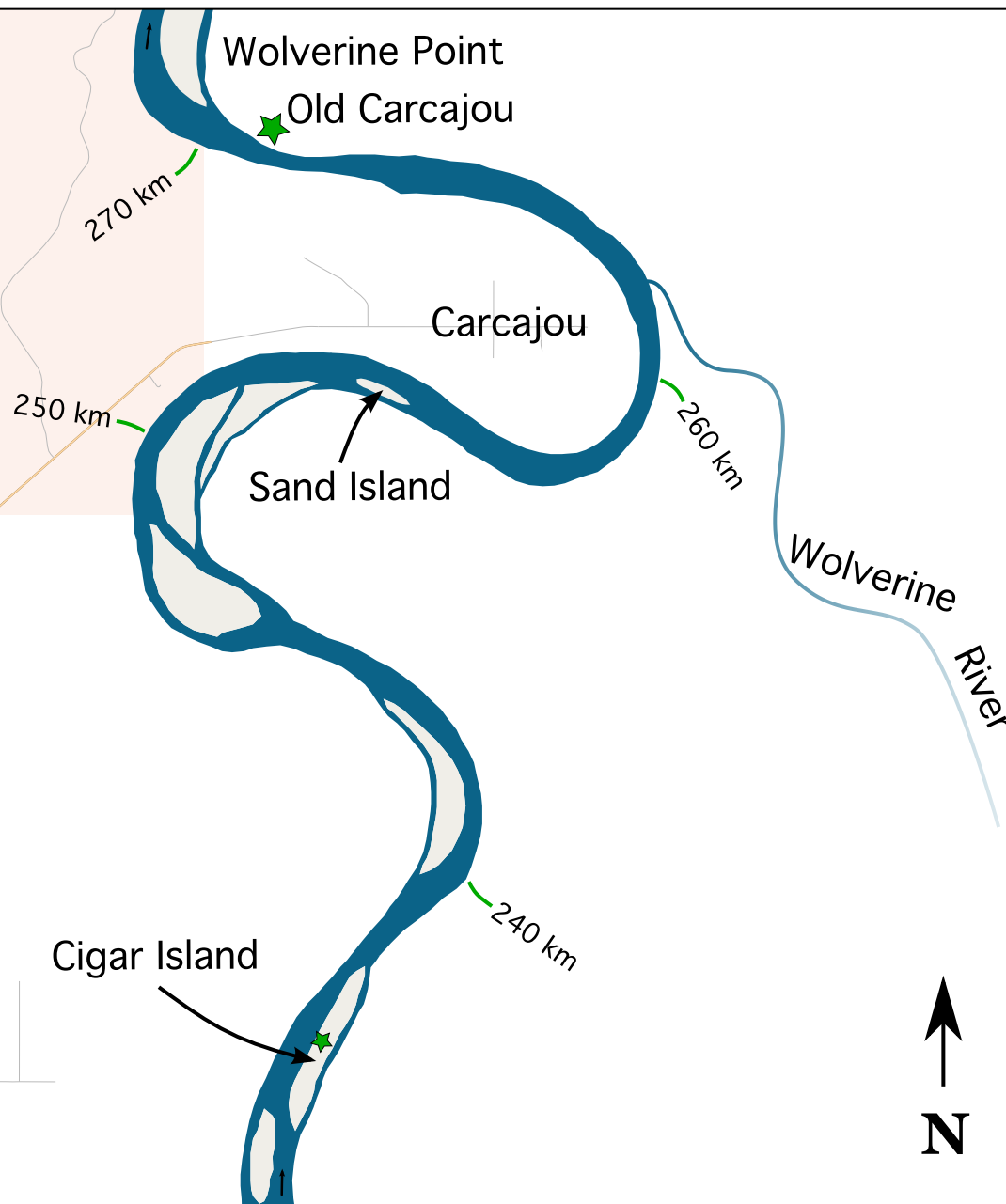
Looking down from a plateau along the Big Bend



# Peace River Guide

## Map 20

Paddle Prairie  
Métis Settlement



Base map data by OpenStreetMap, CC-BY-SA  
[www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org)

## Guide 20

### Cigar Island to Old Carcajou

Name of River Section	Cigar Island to Old Carcajou
Paddling Time	3.5 – 7 hrs
Paddling Distance	33 km (236 – 269 km) [612 – 645 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids
Portage	none
Typical speed of current on this section	4-6 km/hr
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	none
Appeal to Families & Children	This section of wilderness paddling has some wonderful history, old cabins, and trails to explore!
Appeal to People with passion for topic	Curves, islands and towering hillsides mix with history and portage trails for a very memorable day.
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★★
Possible as a day-trip?	No
NTS maps required for this section	84 F (F/10, F/11, F/14, F/15, especially F/11 and F/14)

Today's paddling proves that the shortest distance between two points is not a straight line. The river winds its way back and forth, but even this circuitous route is the fastest way through a wilderness of hills and bush. Don't look at the map and moan at all the distance to paddle. Take a closer look at your *topo map*, and you'll see that there are significant banks in this area, and to go over

them is no easy job.

Yet that is exactly what early pioneers did. There is a portage trail that “cuts off” the Carcajou peninsula, but to walk it wouldn't have been easy. Unfortunately, I was unable to find where the southern end of the portage trail comes down the bank to the river — it would be a steep trail. It is possible to follow the somewhat-overgrown trail in other areas of the peninsula. The trail leads all the way to Armstrong's Flat, which you'll see tomorrow.

You'll start your paddling with a gentle bend to the left and then the right, staying to the right of the first two islands. The second island, in fact, has beautiful sand bars along its edge, so you can stop there and relax if you'd like. Don't stay too long as there are lots of things to see today! On river left, around 250 km, there is an interesting sag pond about 7 m (23 feet) above river level (waypoint D20P01). Pass the next three islands on the outside curve (the left). The third island is known locally as Sand Island. Look for some houses perched way up high on the left cliff around 250 km; these are homes of local Métis people. There is a gravel road that leads from the Mackenzie Highway all the way to the tip of the Carcajou peninsula – the first road in 67 km of paddling! Dr. Mary Percy Jackson, the Keg River area's first doctor, used this road to travel from her home in the Keg River area to the river to take the *D.A. Thomas* into Peace River from time to time.

Along the south-facing hills you'll see wild sage covering the slopes. Many varieties of wild sage can be found throughout North



America, although it doesn't usually cover such a large area. This sage, *artemisia frigida*, grows abundantly in this area, covering the hillsides with its fragrant leaves.

It's important to note that while the land on river left from approximately latitude 57° 43.8' N to 58° 4.7' N is all part of the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement, the actual Carcajou peninsula is not; it is part of the County of Northern Lights instead. There's more on the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement in tomorrow's guide (#21).



Around 256.5 km, you'll find Howard's landing on river left (D20P02). It was the place where riverboats stopped on the upper

(upstream) side of the peninsula. You'll see a boat landing cut out of the bank – it is maintained by a local man with a grader. Howard B. Price, whom the landing is named for, was a war veteran who settled this area in 1954 and started farming on the flat. He raised pigs and grew grain. He loved to sing and on a nice day you could hear him all over the flat, and was generally loved by all his neighbours. Howard's grave is up the hill a little ways – follow the road up from the boat launch and then to the left (D20P03). Notice that from Howard's Landing to Howard's Grave, you'll pass from UTM Northing 6300000 to 6400000 (and also as you paddle around the curve towards Carcajou).

If you continue along this trail up the hill, you'll go by a government water monitoring station. After about a kilometre of walking farther, you'll get to a beautiful lookout spot (D20P04). You can look down on the river from the top of the high bank you just paddled by and see for many miles. This is a favourite spot for local people too, and you may even see a teepee there. Wild sage covers the hill below; pick a few pieces and enjoy its wonderful scent.

The original Carcajou settlement, which we now call “Old Carcajou,” was on the right bank, downstream of the peninsula on another promontory called Wolverine Point. As the first settlers here were French and Métis fur traders, the name was changed to Carcajou, the French word for wolverine. The word “carcajou” is itself stolen and “Frenchified” from the Algonquin word for the



fierce creature. Old Carcajou is the destination for today, and when you arrive, you will be able to explore some historic log buildings.

Wolverine are from the weasel family, but look a bit like a small bear. They are 65–87 cm (25–34 inches) long, with a tail 17–26 cm (7–10 inches) long. They have sharp teeth and claws, and are dark brown/black with white/beige markings or stripes reminiscent of skunks. They are fierce, but quite rare.

Continue paddling around the left curve towards the end of the Carcajou peninsula. You'll see a row of seasonal cottages; unfortunately, all the riverfront land is privately-owned. There is no public access along this stretch; even the boat launch is private.

These cottages and the flat beyond are always in danger of flooding in spring, and there have been several notable floods when the ice breakup created an ice dam and water backed up dangerously high. In the fall of 1933, a warm spell and rising water caused the ice to melt and then refreeze in mountainous formations, which the local native people knew was a sign of trouble. One native man in particular, Xavier Sowan, tried to warn people, some of whom listened and evacuated. In April of 1934, water started backing up behind an ice dam thirty to forty feet (9 – 12 m) high, and the water rose about a foot (30 cm) per hour. One trapper, Tom Dimsley, came back from trapping late one night and noticed water on the rise. He slept on the high bank and in the morning found his cabin flooded up to its roof. He made a quick raft out of a few logs, and floated over to his cabin and opened up the roof at one corner.

He was able to save a bit of food that was above the water line as well as his furs, although they needed drying. Another trapper, whose cabin was on an island, woke up to water at his feet. He ended up climbing on his roof and sitting in his underwear until the water went down. More recent floods occurred in 1974 and 2003. There is a homemade metal high-water marker indicating the extent of the flood on 2003. The water rose about 20 m (66 feet) that year (derived from waypoint altitude measurements)!

There are still a couple of families that farm on the flat, including the Tupperts, descendants of an original pioneer family in the area, who operate a buffalo ranch farther up the hill. On the flat, there are approximately 4 sections (2,560 acres) of cultivated farmland, and running through the middle of one field is a grass runway! Some of the cottage owners prefer to fly in.

From approximately 1930 until 1951, two Carcajou men, Jack O'Sullivan and Ted Stigsen, ran a large boat, about 290 feet long, to provide service between Fort Vermilion and the town of Peace River. Initially, it was a steam-powered paddle wheeler named *Wolverine*, but it was inefficient and used a lot of fuel. They then converted it into a propeller boat and renamed it *Beaver*, which gave the residents good, reliable service until 1952.

Near the tip of the peninsula, the Wolverine River flows in from the east (river right). This is a favourite local fishing hole, so you might want to try catching supper near the river mouth.

Wolverine Point, coming up on the right, was a stopover and

home for natives and fur traders, and the spot is even seen on one of David Thompson's maps as early as 1814. Beaver Indians were the original inhabitants, and the Northwest Company started a post here in the early 1800's. Some Indians and Métis lived here, and in the



early 1930's, the first Mennonite settlers came. They all eventually moved on, most to La Crete and a few back to Saskatchewan; the last family left in 1946.

As you continue paddling, you'll see a sandy beach preceding the mostly-dried-up island on the left. Today's campsite is coming up on the right. Watch for the boat launch and you are there (D20P06)! You can camp virtually anywhere you like on the grassy

flat – most of it is crown land. There is one old cabin almost straight up from the boat landing, and in the long grass, an old flat-bottomed wooden scow, decaying (photo at left), and an old International truck, rusting.

Off to the right of the boat launch, there is a road which leads past a trailer that is only occasionally occupied by a local farmer who works the fields on the flat (which are north of the landing). This farmer lives in La Crete and brings himself and his equipment across the river on a barge which he built, which you may have seen at the landing when you arrived. If it's not there, look across the river and you'll see it at the boat launch on the other side (this is one







of your emergency roads). Farther down the road, you can explore a few other old cabins and a graveyard. It was originally an Indian graveyard, but some early settlers are buried here, too. There is an iron cross marking the grave of Isabrand Friesen, who died February 5, 1937 of an illness, just 3 years after starting to farm on McGrane's Flat (now called Armstrong's Flat). Maria Friesen and her five children moved to the Buffalo Head Hills area the

following year, as she and Isabrand had planned.

From the boat landing, following the road to the left, you'll find several buildings, including an old store (see photo on previous page, right column). It was built by C.W. McLean, probably in the 1920's, and passed through several owners until Ted Stigsen took over; he ran the store until 1978. Behind and left of the store is what appears to be the oldest log building, the warehouse, with the roof collapsed. This land is owned by George Peters of La Crete (permission has been given to GeoTourism Canada guests to camp here).

The village was surveyed in 1916 by J.W. Pierce. He noted there were nine houses, three stables, a barn, four gardens, two storehouses (one belonged to the Hudson Bay Company), a Roman Catholic church and a graveyard. From 1934-38 there was even a school, which is still standing. If

you take the right-hand trail up from the boat launch (the southeasterly trail), and walk about 300 m, it is the large log building set back from the trail, with a large opening cut into the back end — it was used as a barn at some point after the school closed (see the photo on this page). Old Carcajou was the main stopover for river transportation between Fort Vermilion and Peace River Crossing.

## START – Cigar Island

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Keg River, AB T0H 2G0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	Manning, AB
County or Municipal District	County of Northern Lights
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0494797 Northing 6389854
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	57° 39.071' N 117° 5.285' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	264 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual slope

## END – Old Carcajou

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Carcajou, AB T0H 0R0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	High Level, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	George Peters
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting Point	11V Easting 0493293 Northing 64053523
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	57° 47.409' N 117° 6.768' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m

Altitude of Site in meters	260 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Medium slope up boat launch to the flat

## Waypoints

- D20P01 (pond): 57° 44.550' N 117° 8.256' W / 11V Easting 0491808 Northing 6400050 / elev 255 m
- D20P02 (Howard's Landing): 57° 44.511' N 117° 2.028' W / 11V Easting 0497988 Northing 6399970 / elev 258 m
- D20P03 (Howard's grave): 57° 44.530' N 117° 1.942' W / 11V Easting 0498073 Northing 6400007 / elev 264 m
- D20P04 (look-out): 57° 44.789' N 117° 2.658' W / 11V Easting 0497363 Northing 6400487 / elev 280 m
- D20P05 (boat launch): 57° 47.112' N 117° 6.696' W / 11V Easting 0493364 Northing 6404802 / elev 262 m
- D20P06 (end point):** 57° 47.409' N 117° 6.768' W / 11V Easting 0493293 Northing 64053523 / elev 260 m

## Possible Campsites

- Around 249 km, on the high bank of the outside curve. There is a small plateau beside a pond, which means thick mosquitoes! Stop and climb the bank for a nice photo op, but camp here only if you must (D20P01).
- Howard's Landing (D20P02), around 256 km. You could camp in

a little clearing uphill from the landing.

- The lookout (D20P04), located about 1 km up the hill from Howard's grave (D20P03). Land your boat at Howard's Landing (D20P02).

## Emergency Road Access

Howard's Landing will get you off the water, but you'll have to walk along a road for help – take the right fork, the “low road,” after climbing the boat launch road. This will lead to the cottages. Alternately, you can paddle 4 km farther to get to the cottages. There is road access there – you'll have to walk through private property to get to it (understandable in an emergency), or ask for help from the cottagers (this is the emergency access with the least amount of walking). Across from Old Carcajou, there is a boat launch (D20P05) with a truck trail that leads to a road. Once you reach the main east-west road, Twp Rd 695, you may want to try going east (left) to a nearby local farm for help.

## Bibliography

*Jam in the Bedroll* by Sheila Douglass

*Way Out Here, A History of Carcajou, Chinchaga, Keg River, Paddle Prairie, Twin Lakes* published by the Keg River History Book Committee, 1994

***Peace River Paddling Guide***

Alberta Place Names:

[http://www.albertasource.ca/placenames/multimedia/pierre\\_au\\_calu met.html](http://www.albertasource.ca/placenames/multimedia/pierre_au_calu met.html)

*A Heritage of Homesteads, Hardships and Hope.* Published by the La Crete and Area Then and Now Society, 1989.

## Images

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

Howard Price's grave

Wooden scow

The old Carcajou store

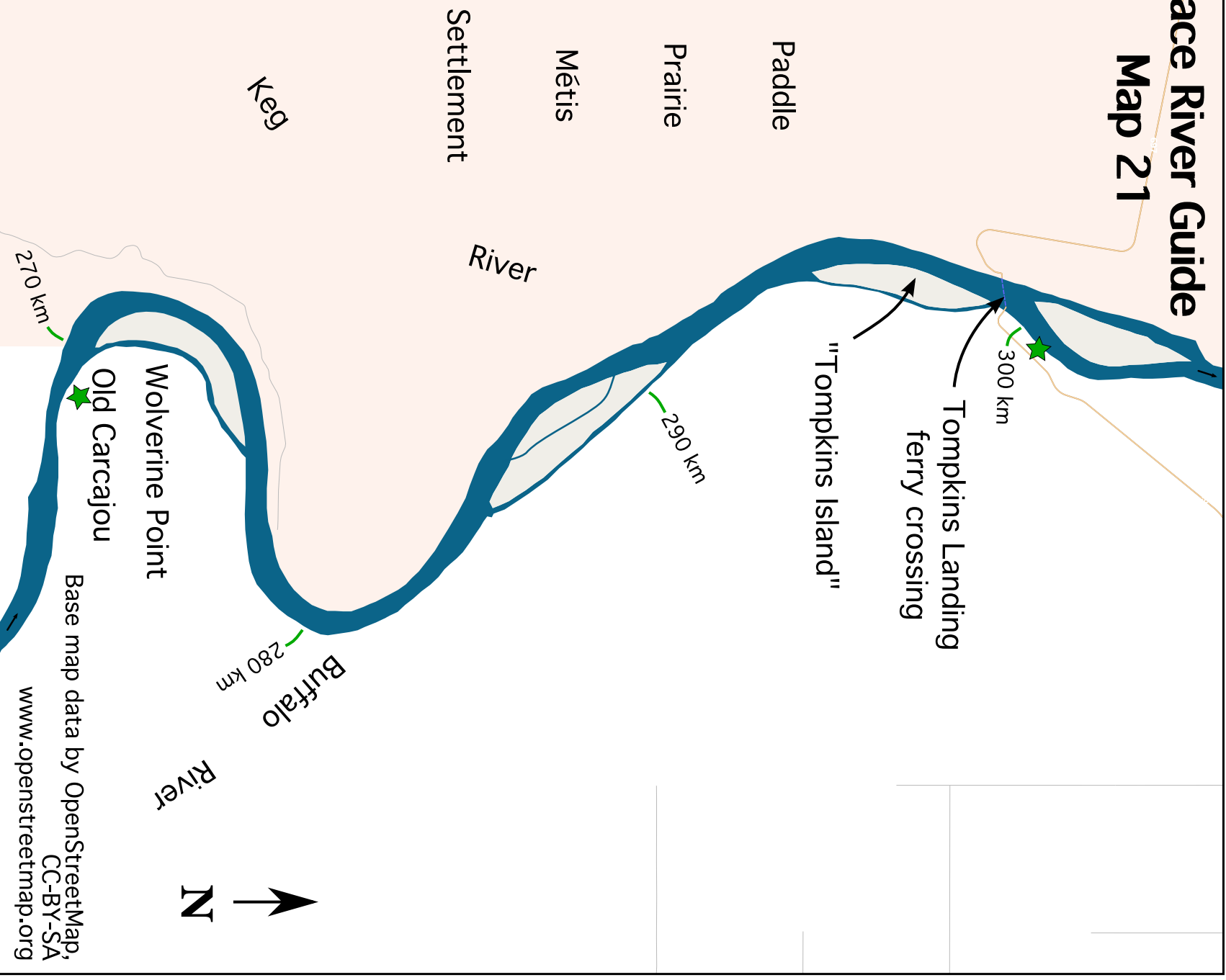
The Carcajou Point School, built circa 1933-4





# Peace River Guide

## Map 21



## Guide 21

### Old Carcajou to La Crete Ferry Campground

Name of River Section	Old Carcajou to La Crete Ferry Campground	
Paddling Time	3.5 – 7 hrs	
Paddling Distance	31 (269 – 300 km)	[645 – 676 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids	
Portage	none	
Typical speed of current on this section	4-6 km/hr	
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	none	
Appeal to Families & Children	Enjoy history and scenery, with a chance to explore a flat and see old cabins and a ferry, ending at a newly-established campground.	
Appeal to People with passion for topic	This trip features islands, curves, two picturesque river mouths, and a ferry crossing	
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★★	
Possible as a day-trip?	No	
NTS maps required for this section	84 F (F/14)	

You'll continue paddling north today, passing two beautiful river mouths and enjoying more Northern Alberta wilderness.

Make sure you take any pictures you want before you depart Old Carcajou. All the routes around islands are obvious today, as

each island is tucked into the shore and most narrow channels are unnavigable except at extreme high water. First off today, you'll paddle around the island and right bend that is Wolverine Point.

There is a nice campsite at the downstream end of the first island you'll pass today. You'll notice that the river banks are quite muddy in general now, but the mud can be quite compacted, as long as there hasn't been any recent rain.

As you come around the curve of Wolverine Point, look ahead onto the left bank. Does the bank look like a flat line? There is a portage/pioneer trail along the bank. There were trails all over the land in the early days, leading from Old Carcajou, around the



Buffalo Head Hills, to La Crete and on to Fort Vermilion. This one on the left bank led from the Carcajou Peninsula.

Along the left bank, near where the high bank drops down, is a trail that leads up the hill (D21P01). The trail leads to Armstrong's flat, originally called McGrane's flat, after the first white settlers to make a life there. Dick and May McGrane raised cows, horses, sheep, and foxes. The flat was flooded badly in the flood of 1934, and they sold the sheep and horses to the Friesens and left the area in 1935. Two other families lived on this flat for a time but moved to Buffalo Head Prairie in 1936. Isabrand Friesen passed away in 1937, and Maria Friesen and her sons joined the growing Mennonite community in La Crete in 1939.

In 1915, Irish man James Armstrong came through the Peace River area as part of a survey crew. He had been a sailor and had sailed around Cape Horn three times before coming to Canada. He was a big strong man, and he helped bring the telephone line from Keg River to Carcajou. He married Adeline Couterielle and they

had eleven children. Most of them went to the school in Carcajou, and at some point (date unknown), the Armstrongs moved to the flat and began making a life there, farming and raising livestock. The land is still in the Armstrong family.

There is a second access point to Armstrong's Flat (D20P02), which leads you past an old iron plow and one of the first cabins built here. There is still land being farmed north of the flat you're on. Feel free to roam and explore the flat, but please respect the modern home and belongings. You can walk up the pioneer trail (in the upstream direction, uphill) and enjoy the amazing view from that vantage point.

Shortly downstream from the access points to Armstrong's flat is the mouth of the Buffalo River (D21P03), on the right (see photo on next page). It is a lovely spot – cast a line here to try your luck at fishing. Looking at your topo map, notice how the Buffalo River and Wolverine River are somewhat parallel to each other, both flowing in from the east into eastern bends in the river. They both originate in and flow down the





western slopes of the Buffalo Head Hills. These two rivers are separated by a ridge of land to the east.

All day, you will be paddling beside the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement on the left shore. The following comes from the Métis Settlements General Council's website:

“The Métis are Canada’s first children. From the 1600’s to late 1800’s, European fur traders joined with Aboriginal women. Their mixed blood children were able to function in both Aboriginal and European societies. They adapted European technologies to the wilderness, through innovations such as Red River Carts and York Boats, making it possible to transport large volumes of goods. As this group increased in number and married amongst themselves, they developed a new culture, neither European nor Indian, but a fusion of the two — the Métis.”

Almost 170,000 hectares was set aside in 1939, as a result of the 1938 Alberta Government Bill, the Métis Betterment Act. It is one of only eight Métis settlements in Canada, all of which are in Alberta. Although the original structure of the Métis settlements allowed for a great deal of self-governance, the Métis have contended with the provincial government as some of these policies were changed in subsequent years. In 1989, the Métis Settlements Accord was adopted, resulting in all eight settlements being governed by a common council with a great deal of self-

governance. The Paddle Prairie settlement has a population of about 1500.



About 9 km downstream of the Buffalo River is the mouth of the Keg River (D21P04), on the left (290 km). If the water level allows, go upstream a little ways; this river was used extensively for the fur trade, and the HBC even had a post many kilometres upstream. A little ways up the Keg River, on the left, you'll notice the bank is made of very dark rocks. This is an oil-bearing shale from the Cretaceous Loon River Formation, similar to the oil sands that are found elsewhere in Alberta. There was a fur trading post established near the mouth of the Keg River before 1800 by the



Northwest Company that operated for at least 15 years. There are contradicting records as to what side of the Peace it was on!

Keep an eye out for a trapper's cabin along river left, just near the upstream end of the next island — labelled on the accompanying map as “Tompkins Island.” Be cautious of the sandbars preceding this island; they can be extensive, causing you to stay left. As you approach Tompkins Landing and the ferry crossing (299 km, waypoint D21P05), try to judge or time how long it takes the ferry to cross and plan your approach accordingly. You must give this ferry a very wide berth, as it has a strong wake. If water levels are very low, you may not see the ferry operating; it has a draught of 1 m (3 feet) and if the water gets too shallow, it cannot cross.

Tompkins Landing is said to be named after Peter Tompkins (sometimes spelled Tomkins), an “early explorer or surveyor.” A little more research reveals that Peter Tompkins Sr. worked as an Inspector for Indian Affairs and also as a land agent in Grouard in the early 1900's. He may well have passed through this area on a tour. His son, Peter Tompkins Jr., was an activist and founding member of the Métis Association of Alberta. Considering that the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement is along the west shore of the river, this could be the “Peter Tompkins” the landing is named after.

The ferry crossing began here in 1961. The first ferry was brought from Dunvegan – it was no longer needed there because

the suspension bridge was completed in 1960. When the ferry cannot operate due to ice, there is no way to cross until the ice is thick enough for an ice bridge. To provide a crossing during the spring and fall, when the river is part-open and part-ice, a hoverferry was put into operation in 1977. It rode on a cushion of air about 50 cm (~20 inches) thick and was pulled across the river by a cable and winch system. Unfortunately, there was too much mechanical trouble with the cable and winch to keep the ferry in operation. The present ferry, *La Crete*, has been in service since 1987. It is 33.4 m (~110 ft) long and 32 m (105 ft) wide and can carry a load of 95 metric tons (209,400 lbs), which includes fully



loaded trucks hauling wood chips or grain. For vehicles starting from the Buffalo Head Prairie area, the ferry route (or ice bridge in winter) is 110 km shorter than going around through High Level to points south. You are welcome to ride the ferry as a passenger – simply walk on (under the direction of the ferryman).

Your destination for today is along river right, about 1.4 km downstream of the ferry crossing (D21P06). Watch for three flags and come ashore as close as possible to them; climbing the bank here will bring you near the swing set and large group shelter. Camp sites are to the right (south). Tenting sites are \$15/night. Talk to the campground attendant and see if he/she can show you some remains of an old cabin, which may or may not be associated with a sawmill that operated on this flat at one time.

### Additional Notes:

You can pull out at the ferry crossing if this is the endpoint for your trip (the west side/river left is best, just upstream of the ferry ramp).

This section of the river could be made into a day trip by starting from the boat launch at D20P05 or Howard's Landing, D20P02 (an extra ~13 km of paddling, for a daily total of 44 km). To get to Howard's Landing, drive past all the cottages and follow a trail (on the right) along the edge of the farmer's field to a trail through the bush to the landing. Or, you can ask one of the cottagers if they would give you river access through their property.

## START – Old Carcajou

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Carcajou, AB T0H 0R0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	High Level, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	George Peters
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting Point	11V Easting 0493293 Northing 64053523
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	57° 47.409' N 117° 6.768' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	260 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Medium slope up boat launch to the flat

## END – La Crete Ferry Campground

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Paddle Prairie, AB T0H 2W0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	Exit Hwy 35 onto secondary Hwy 697. Follow the road east for 17.5 km. Cross ferry. Turn left almost immediately. Stay right and follow road about 1 km to get to the campground.
Parking Instructions at Site	Standard campground parking
Ownership of Site	Mackenzie County
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0492810 Northing 6426603
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	57° 58.861' N 117° 07.294' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m

Altitude of Site in meters	256 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Climb medium-steep bank to campground flat

## Waypoints

D21P01 (Armstrong's 1): 57° 49.666' N 117° 3.345' W / 11V  
Easting 0496689 Northing 6409537 / 253 m

D21P02 (Armstrong's 2): 57° 49.714' N 117° 3.056' W / 11V  
Easting 0496975 Northing 6409626 / elev 255 m

D21P03 (Buffalo River): 57° 50.312' N 117° 0.890' W / 11V  
Easting 0499119 Northing 6410733

D21P04 (Keg River): 57° 53.751' N 117° 6.929' W / 11V Easting  
0493154 Northing 6417121

D21P05 (Ferry): 57° 58.407' N 117° 8.475' W / 11V Easting  
0491644 Northing 6425762

**D21P06 (end point):** 57° 58.861' N 117° 07.294' W / 11V Easting  
0492810 Northing 6426603 / elev 256 m

## Possible Campsites

- Around 276 km, river right, at the downstream tip of the island.
- Armstrong's Flat, accessed by D21P01 or D21P02. There's plenty of room to camp on the flat, and the landowner welcomes GeoTourism Canada campers.

## Emergency Road Access

Directly across from Old Carcajou, there is a boat landing

with a road which leads to Twp Rd 695. The only other road access before Tompkins Landing is from Armstrong's Flat. This long road leads back to Twp Rd 695 (Carcajou Rd). Immediately before Tompkins, there is a trail along river right at about 293 km, which leads to Tompkins Landing (east bank).

## Bibliography

*Way Out Here, A History of Carcajou, Chinchaga, Keg River, Paddle Prairie, Twin Lakes* published by the Keg River History Book Committee, 1994

Métis Settlements General Council,  
<http://www.msgc.ca/Resources/Heritage/Default.ksi>

<http://nextyearcountrynews.blogspot.com/2010/05/peter-tomkins-jr-metis-socialist.html>

## Images

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

A pioneer trail is visible along the edge of the bank.

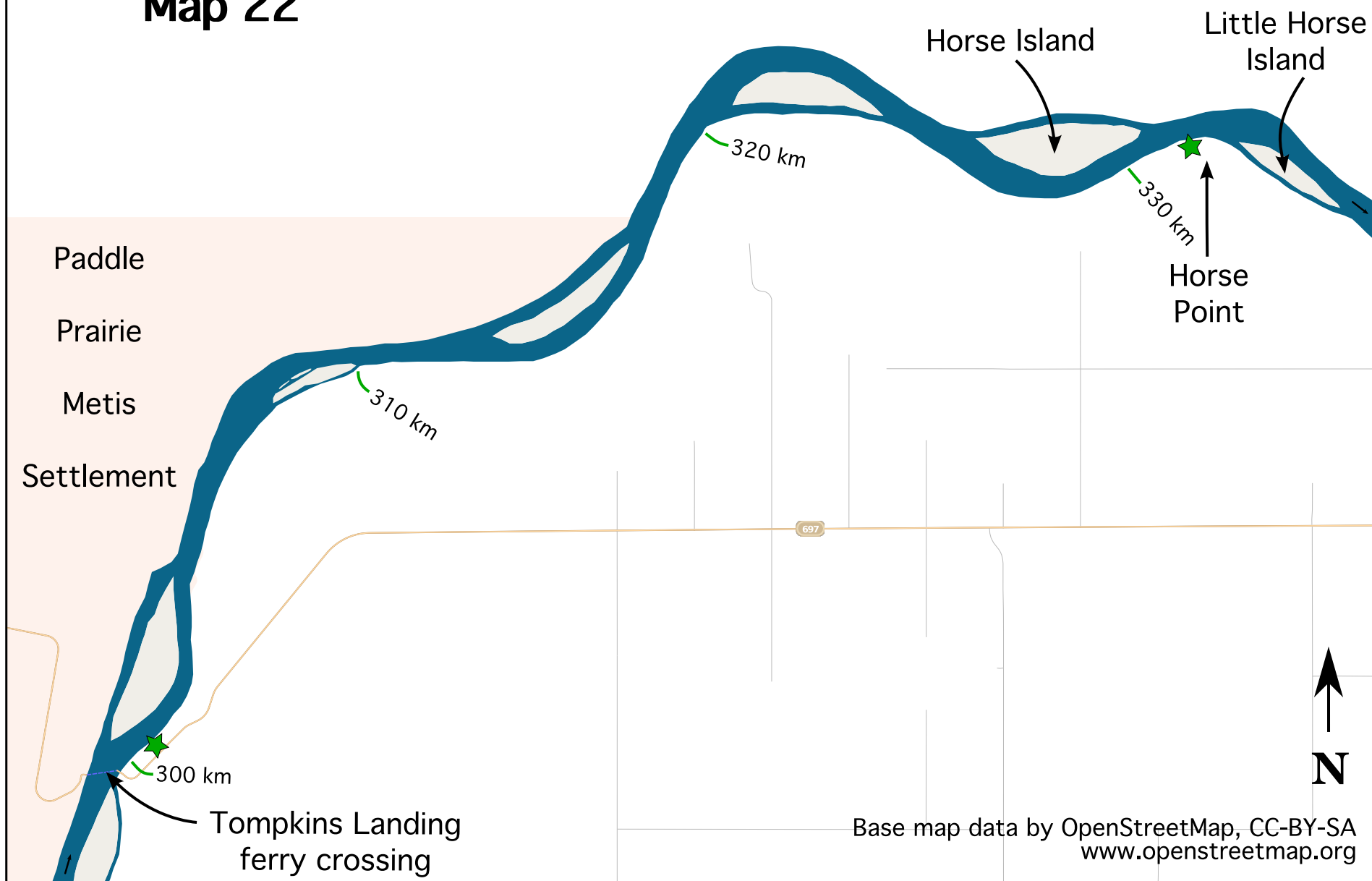
Armstrong's Flat

Mouth of the Buffalo River

The Tompkins Landing Ferry, *La Crete*

# Peace River Guide

## Map 22





## Guide 22

### La Crete Ferry Campground to Horse Point

Name of River Section	La Crete Ferry Campground to Horse Point	
Paddling Time	3.5 – 7 hrs	
Paddling Distance	32 km (300 – 332 km)	[676 – 708 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids	
Portage	none	
Typical speed of current on this section	2-5 km/hr	
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	none	
Appeal to Families & Children	This reach makes a wonderful first day of a two-, three-, or four-day family paddling trip – you decide how long/far to go.	
Appeal to People with passion for topic	The river widens today as it weaves its way between large islands and affords some unique rockhounding opportunities.	
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★	
Possible as a day-trip?	No	
NTS maps required for this section	84 F, K (F/14, K/2, K/3)	

Another day of scenic paddling awaits you! The banks are not as high, but continue to afford some interesting scenery and rockhounding opportunities. The river turns eastward today and

weaves its way among large islands. You'll paddle an easy 32 km today to a unique, hidden gem of a camping spot.

Note: If you wish to start your trip here, you can put in on the west side of the river, up or downstream of the ferry approach. Below the ferry works well, just be cautious of its wake. The main channel around the first island is to the right (it is quite shallow to the left).

You'll start off paddling right of a large island. Within the first 2 km or so, you'll need to switch topo maps as you enter 58 degrees North! The islands that start at 308 km are not as depicted on topo maps. There are 3 islands on the right (not just one) and a sand bar/island on the left. In general on the reach today, if you see a gravel bar indicated on your topo maps, believe it. In shallow water (discharge around less than 500 m<sup>3</sup>/s), you will probably hit bottom with your paddle in these areas.

At 310 km (waypoint D22P01), you can see an excellent example of a “drunken forest” on river left (see photo on next page). In this instance, erosion on the bank was slow enough and did not tumble in such a way that overly disturbed the trees, so they continue to grow, but at odd angles. There is a great deal of erosion along this section of the river.

In 2010 when this guide was written, there was a large concretion – almost perfectly round rock – at the base of the drunken forest. This of course may not be there when you paddle by, but a watchful eye will find several concretions in the next 100



km or so, beginning with a few nice ones along the base of – and partially embedded in – a steep grey cliff of Loon River Formation shale on river right about 4 km downstream of the drunken forest (the cliff is visible from D22P03). This is a nice spot for a little rockhounding, assuming water levels are low enough to allow you some bank to walk on. One of the large concretions showed petrified wood in its center. For more on concretions, see guide #15.

Petrified wood forms when wood has minerals slowly seep into it, replacing the organic material with inorganic compounds.

The result is rock which looks exactly like the original piece of wood, including annual growth rings. The wood must be buried for this process to take place (so that the wood doesn't just decompose). If you find a piece, pick it up to feel the weight of the rock. Petrified wood is Alberta's provincial stone, and the colours present represent different minerals. The most common colour along the Peace River in this reach is pink or light yellow, indicating iron oxides and manganese. Petrified rock is quite common, and you have a good chance of finding some at this rock cliff.

Starting around Tompkins Landing, the surface rocks on both sides of the river are now classified as Eolian deposits. This means rather than being deposited in a glacial lake, as is the case with the area farther south, they were wind-driven. There are some unique, mature sand dunes west of the river near Hungry Bend (see guide #24), but you'll notice the islands and banks look different than those farther south, in particular near Peace River. Some Eolian deposits have been along the river since you left Notikewin, especially the right (east) side. As mentioned in other guides, the bedrock is now the Loon River formation (Cretaceous period), primarily marine shale and siltstone, noted for having concretions.

Around 318 km, on the left just after the left island ends, is the approximate location of LaFleur's Post, also called Fort



Vermilion I. This was a long-lived fur trading post built by J.B. LaFleur of the Northwest Company in 1798. It was still in operation when the HBC and NWC joined in 1821, and was abandoned sometime around 1830 when the fort was moved to Fort Vermilion's present location. It is unusual for a fur trade post to last this long; many were only open for a few seasons before being abandoned/relocated. An archaeologist from the Archaeological Survey of Alberta has done several digs in this area, discovering chimney piles and cellular depressions. The site of the post is so thickly overgrown that it is very difficult to get to, and most people would not see anything even if they found it.

You might see a shiny silver houseboat along this section of the river! A man from High Level built a houseboat many years ago and spends as much time as possible on the river in summer. It is easy to spot, even from a distance, because it's covered in aluminum newspaper printing plates – his son is publisher of the local newspapers, and the used printing plates are for sale at a low price.

You'll pass a large island on the next curve (321-325 km), and the following island is Horse Island. There is a possible campsite along the edge of this island. Today's destination is along river right near the tip of the corner, Horse Point, at about 332 km. Look for a quad trail leading up the bank (see photo at right). There is a small clearing just at the top of the bank which is suitable for 1-2 tents, but it is right along the trail. People who live nearby, at the top of the valley to the south, like to use this trail for all-terrain vehicles



and horses, so make sure you don't obstruct the trail. You can enjoy supper in the sun on the rocky beach below – in June & July, the sun sets sufficiently far enough north – and take a walk down the riverbank trail.

You can also walk a little farther up the trail leading up the bank and you'll discover a small cabin in a clearing of tall white spruce trees. The cabin is on crown land, so if you'd like to use it, feel free – just make sure to leave it in the same (or better) condition as you found it. This cabin wouldn't sleep more than 2 or 3 people, but if you're part of a larger group, there is room to camp in the clearing near the cabin. It was built by local people, and it's rather unlikely they will show up and ask you to leave.

## START – La Crete Ferry Campground

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Paddle Prairie, AB T0H 2W0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	35
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	Exit Hwy 35 onto secondary Hwy 697. Follow the road east for 17.5 km. Cross ferry. Turn left almost immediately. Stay right and follow road about 1 km to get to the campground.
Parking Instructions at Site	Standard campground parking
Ownership of Site	Mackenzie County
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0492810 Northing 6426603
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	57° 58.861' N 117° 07.294' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	256 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Climb medium-steep bank to campground flat

## END – Horse Point

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Buffalo Head Prairie, AB T0H 4A0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	697
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting	11V Easting 0514365 Northing 6439136

Point	
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	58° 5.605' N 116° 45.380' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	255 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual at first, then steep for a short ways

## Waypoints

D22P01 (drunken forest): 58° 3.140' N 117° 2.684' W / 11V Easting 0497360 Northing 6434537

D22P02 (possible campsite): 58° 3.082' N 117° 2.507' W / 11V Easting 0497534 Northing 6434430

D22P03 (rockhounding site): 58° 3.286' N 116° 58.718' W / 11V Easting 0501260 Northing 6434807

**D22P04 (end point):** 58° 5.605' N 116° 45.380' W / 11V Easting 0514365 Northing 6439136 / elev 255 m

## Possible Campsites

- Around 310 km there is a small “notch” suitable for one tent along river right (D22P02).
- Along Horse Island, about 327-328 km.

## Emergency Road Access

There are a few all-terrain vehicle trails along the river, but



none especially useful to lead to civilization. The trail at the Horse Point site leads up the valley to the farms beyond and would be your best bet.

## **Bibliography**

None

## **Images**

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

The drunken forest

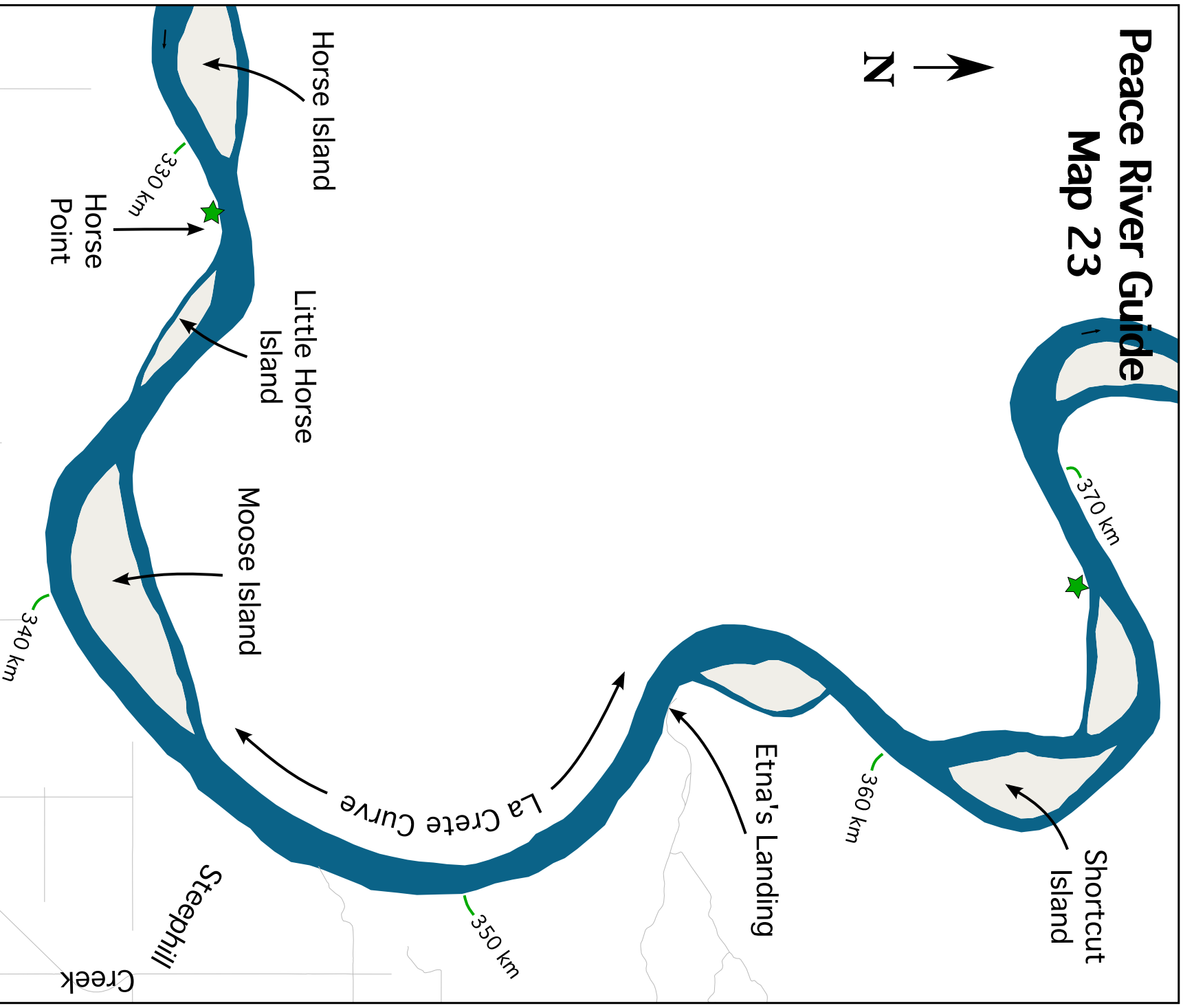
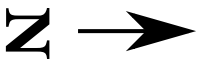
Trail leading up the bank at Horse Point

The cabin



# Peace River Guide

## Map 23





## Guide 23

### Horse Point to Aspin House Area

Name of River Section	Horse Point to Aspin House Area	
Paddling Time	4 – 8 hrs	
Paddling Distance	36 km (332 – 368 km)	[708 – 744 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids	
Portage	none	
Typical speed of current on this section	3-5 km/hr	
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	patchy	
Appeal to Families & Children	Look for moose along Moose Island and stop at a beautiful sandbar beach.	
Appeal to People with passion for topic	Picturesque beaches, islands, gentle curves, and boat landings are the theme of today.	
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★	
Possible as a day-trip?	No	
NTS maps required for this section	84 K (K/2)	

Today, you'll paddle past several landings where settlers to La Crete arrived, and end the day on a lovely bend of the river.

As you depart Horse Point, you'll see a small island on the right, Little Horse Island. In medium-high water (1500 – 2000 m<sup>3</sup>/s), you can go between this island and the right bank, which is a very pretty channel. Otherwise, make your way out into deeper

water and around the island on the left.

As a side note, I observed bubbles of gas coming up from the middle of the river just after departing the Horse Point campsite on a particularly calm day. I could think of no other explanation except naturally-occurring gas escaping from bedrock below the river bed (although I didn't try to ignite any of the gas to confirm my theory).

The first large island today is Moose Island. If you paddle this section in late August or September, you may want to call it “Goose Island” for all the Canada Geese gathered along its upstream end. The shallow gravel shore is a favourite gathering place, and you'll see literally thousands of geese along the river between here and Fort Vermilion. You'll pass Moose Island on the right.

After Moose Island, if the water level is low enough, there is a beautiful sandy beach on the left shore (~344 km). Although it is quite low for camping, it's a great spot for lunch or a break. Fine white sand, facing south, somewhat protected from the wind... what more could a person ask for?

After you pass Moose Island, you'll start the long, gradual left-hand curve which I call the La Crete curve. Beware of a sandbar (or two) in the middle of the river a little ways downstream of Moose Island. Watch for Steephill Creek flowing in on river right, about 2.5 km downstream of the end of Moose Island. There are three landings along the La Crete curve. In the order you'll pass them: Wall's Landing, 347 km (D23P03), La Crete Landing, 348.5 km (D23P04), and Etna's Landing, 355 km (D23P05). You may see

gravel roads and/or vehicles along the water at most of these spots, but the landing used the most is Etna's Landing. It was named after Ettienne (Etna) Rivard. He and his brothers were the first settlers in this area, arriving in 1914. They were from Quebec, and were avoiding the draft into the army in WWI. So, they came out west overland to Peace River, and down the river. They had an uncle in Fort Vermilion, Rocque Rivard, who helped them out a little with food. The spot where they landed and made a homestead is one near a creek mouth; you'll see it left of a creek if you keep an eye out along river right (D23P04). Just slightly upstream on the right bank, there are dark grey rock formations that resemble a rooster's comb – “la crête” in French – and that is how La Crete got its name (now pronounced “lah kreet”). So, the Rivard brothers’ homestead landing is named La Crete Landing, and Etna's Landing is named after Ettienne.

Although some early settlers were French, many of the ones that followed were German-speaking Mennonites. They came from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Mexico, and many were Old Colony Mennonites. They saw the potential for farmland, so they cleared it and made a thriving community to sustain their culture. Between 1930 and 1939, over two hundred people came – some started in Carcajou but they finally settled between Carcajou and Fort Vermilion, what is now La Crete, Buffalo Head Prairie (just north of the Buffalo Head Hills), and Blumenort. To this day, the population is almost completely bilingual (English and La Crete’s own dialect of Low German). Some high German is spoken in

church services as well.

Thousands of acres of crown land were made available as agricultural land during the Accelerated Land Sales Program of the Alberta Government. The last land lottery in the La Crete area was performed as recently as 1985. In Ron Ball and Mac Forbes’ *A Passion for the Land – Public Lands in Alberta*, one man involved in assigning the land, Don Grahn, describes how the land was first evaluated and surveyed. He then tells this story:

“However, the most rewarding part of this whole program was my experience giving land away in the La Crete area one summer day. All the parcels of land had been sorted out into smaller





farm units (about 300-400 acres in size) with advice from the Mennonite elders in the community. Roads had been built by Alberta Transportation. All that was left to do was finish the draw process for about 40 parcels of public land. Somewhere in the process, I came to realize that we were not just giving out land in this area. We were truly part of building a community here. The Mennonite elders had insisted that only young men and women would be eligible to participate in the draw. They were the next generation of Mennonite farmers, who needed their own land to stay in the community, raise their families, continue their faith, and contribute to the community. It was pretty overwhelming at the time, but we did it!”

“We arrived at the Community Hall in La Crete in the morning, were served breakfast, some school children sang *O Canada* and we began the draw. We had about 150 eligible participants; so we used a coffee can with numbers 1-150 written on a piece of paper. There were about 40 parcels of land available, so those participants who drew numbers 1 to 40 were the lucky winners with the person drawing number one able to pick first out of the 40 available parcels. Obviously, for those participants who drew numbers 41 to 150, the day was extremely disappointing and you could see it on their faces the minute they looked at their number. It was heart-wrenching to watch the losers and totally exhilarating to see the faces of the winners. Some participants had such trouble controlling their shaking, they could barely get their hands into the coffee can to pull a number.”

“...We went back one year later to have a look at the area we gave away and almost could not believe the development that was already done or underway. People had already moved or built homes on the land, many acres were already cleared, and spring crops were already growing. All this in less than a year!”

Some people refer to Etna's Landing as “Atlas Landing.” This is actually just a linguistic evolution; when Mennonites speak the “e” sound, it often sounds more like “ah.” So, “Etna's” became “atnas,” which easily became “atlas,” a more sensible word than “atnas.”

You can see Etna's Landing from quite a distance (see photo on previous page); there are high, sandy-looking cliffs on the right, a hint of the sand hills beyond. There is a campground on the top of the flat, so you may see some RVs or trucks, and a portable bridge leading to a large floating dock.

Just after this landing, you'll start the switchback curves. The bedrock in this area is still the Loon River Formation; there are some nice high banks coming up on the left. There are remarkable examples of steeply eroded rills or gullies along these banks – water running down the cliff has eroded channels in the rock, creating wedge-shaped tapered “ribs” along the steep slope with fluvial debris aprons below. Comparable formations when observed on Mars are believed to be strong indicators of liquid water in that planet's past. You'll see another example of this on a bank tomorrow around 382 km. You'll pass 3 large islands before reaching today's



camping spot. The route around the first is straightforward – the right channel is far too small – but you'll have to decide which way to go around the second island, which I've dubbed "Shortcut Island." The difference between the two channels is a kilometre (I used the shorter path when calculating paddling distances). If you take the shortcut (the left channel), you'll paddle past the site of Aspin House.

Aspin House was another early fur trade fort. It was built in 1792 to replace the "Old Establishment" at the Boyer River which had been established 4 years earlier – Alexander Mackenzie mentions stopping there in his journal of 1792. Aspin House was

established by John Finlay. The post facilitated trading with the Beaver Indians as Boyer's Post had also done. It had several other names: Finlay's Post, New Establishment, Fort du Tremble, or Old Aspin Fort. The same archaeologist who studied La Fleur's Post (see guide #22) also studied Aspin House several years ago; he said that evidence of the palisades could still be seen at that time, but they may have since eroded away. The fort was no doubt named after the common tree, although it is spelled "Aspin" instead of our modern spelling, "aspen."

As you finish passing Shortcut Island, be careful of gravel/sand bars. You'll need to pass the last island on the right or outside curve. After this island, the camping spot for today is on river left, beyond the end of the island. Watch for the end of a smaller "island" – you can camp anywhere in this area, on the shore or even on the end of the island if you like. The waypoint (D23P06) is along the shore; the elevation of your campsite will be higher.

## START – Horse Point

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Buffalo Head Prairie, AB T0H 4A0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	697
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown

Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting Point	11V Easting 0514365 Northing 6439136
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	58° 5.605' N 116° 45.380' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	255 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual at first, then steep for a short ways

## END – Aspin House Area

Nearest Community with Postal Code	La Crete, AB T0H 2H0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	697
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0521179 Northing 6455148
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	58° 14.217' N 116° 38.359' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	253 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual up to a flat

## Waypoints

D23P01 (beach): 58° 5.426' N 116° 35.324' W / 11V Easting 0524248 Northing 6438852 / elev 252 m

## Peace River Paddling Guide



D23P02 (SteePhill Creek): 58° 6.100' N 116° 33.436' W / 11V Easting 0526095 Northing 6440115

D23P03 (Wall's Landing): 58° 6.627' N 116° 33.254' W / 11V Easting 0526268 Northing 6441094

D23P04 (La Crete Landing): 58° 7.341' N 116° 32.595' W / 11V Easting 0526906 Northing 6442422

D23P05 (Etna's Landing): 58° 10.019' N 116° 35.973' W / 11V Easting 0523560 Northing 6447370

**D23P06 (end point):** 58° 14.217' N 116° 38.359' W / 11V Easting 0521179 Northing 6455148 / elev 253 m



## Possible Campsites

- About one-third of the way down Moose Island, on river left (about 340 km).
- Between 348 and 354 km, along river left, along the inside of the La Crete curve.
- Etna's Landing (355 km). You can land at the dock or use the shore. Go up the gravel road and you'll find the camp ground.

## Emergency Road Access

You may see an all-terrain vehicle trail leading up from the beach downstream of Moose Island, but it does not lead anywhere helpful. You can get emergency road access from any of the boat landings on river right along the La Crete curve, the final one being Etna's Landing. There is no road access after Etna's Landing.

## Bibliography

*A Heritage of Homesteads, Hardships and Hope.* Published by the La Crete and Area Then and Now Society, 1989.

La Crete Chamber of Commerce

*A Passion for the Land, Public Land in Alberta* by Ron Ball and Mac Forbes, published by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, 2008

***Peace River Paddling Guide***

## Images

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

Etna's Landing from a distance on a smoky day (smoke from forest fires)

Rilles on a steep bank

The shore near the Aspin House area; can you see the bear swimming?





# Peace River Guide

## Map 24

Machesis Lake  
Provincial Recreation Area

Oliver's  
Island

Gooseneck  
Point

Prairie  
Point

Prairie Point  
(Bird Turd)  
Island

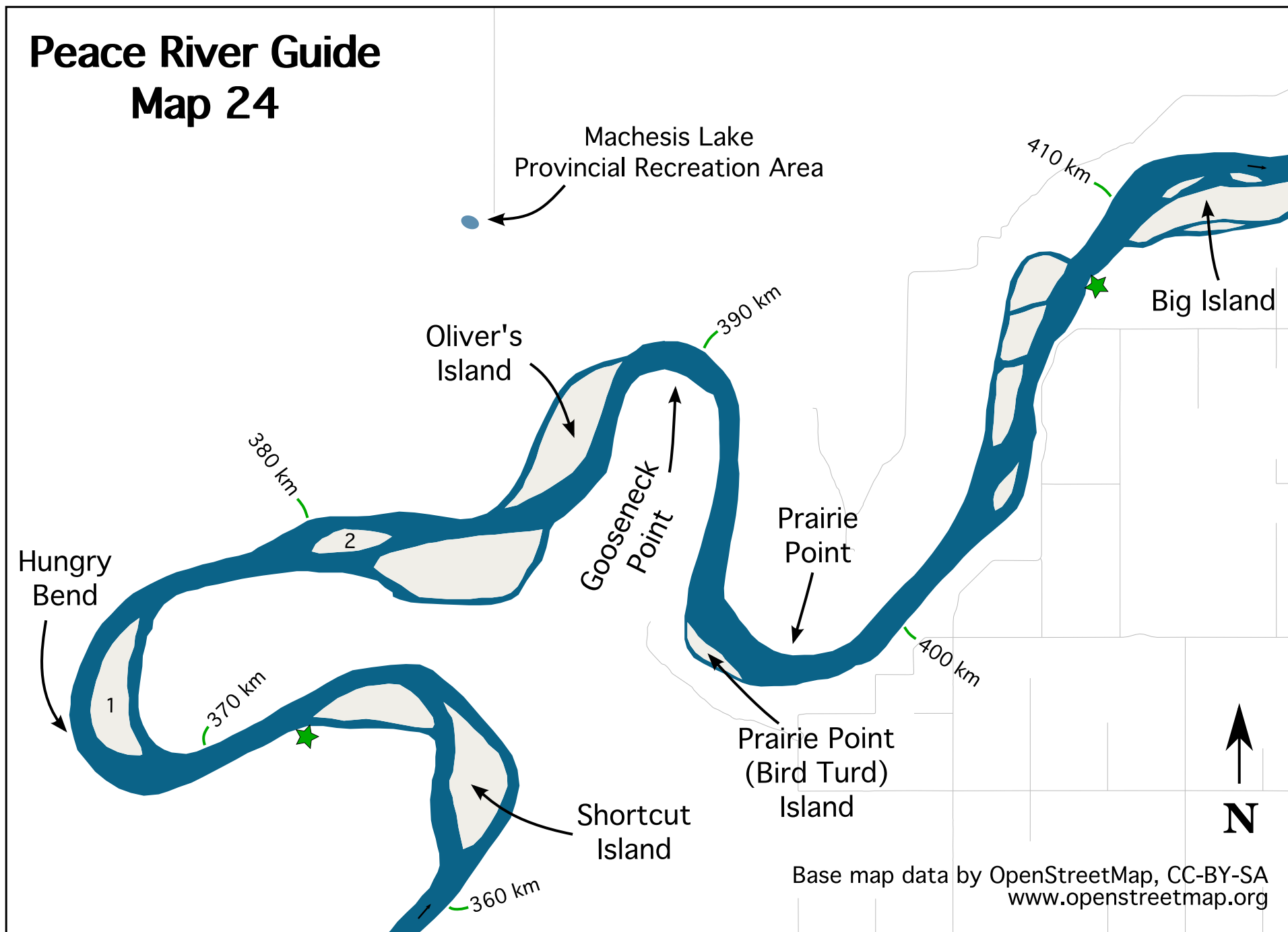
Shortcut  
Island

Big Island

Hungry  
Bend



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[www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org)



## Guide 24

### Aspin House Area to Wieler's Landing

Name of River Section	Aspin House Area to Wieler's Landing	
Paddling Time	3.5 – 7 hrs	
Paddling Distance	40 km (368 – 408 km)	[744 – 784 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids	
Portage	none	
Typical speed of current on this section	3-5 km/hr	
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	none	
Appeal to Families & Children	Take your family on a picturesque trip on the river, and make camp at a lovely spot!	
Appeal to People with passion for topic	The river's banks continue to decrease in height as you paddle through many bends, past eroded banks and islands today.	
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★★	
Possible as a day-trip?	No	
NTS maps required for this section	84 K (K/1 (optional), K/2, K/7, K/8)	

The river gets bendy today, as it works its way past the last high banks you'll see. Don't despair that you're going to paddle 40 km today what the crow flies in less than 19 km! This trip isn't about efficiency – it's about *enjoyment*! If you're a little tired from the longer paddle today, don't worry — you can take it easy

tomorrow with only 28 km to go!

The first bend of the day is Hungry Bend. I suppose that the fur traders, paddling upstream heading towards Aspin House, were grumpy at the long time it was taking and got hungry. Plan to go the long way around Island 1 unless the water is fairly high (discharge approximately 2000 m<sup>3</sup>/s or greater). The Hungry Bend Sand Hills are west of here — an area of wonderful sand dunes, old-growth pine ridges and diverse and rare plants (unfortunately, too far to walk to).

The left bank will be the high one for the first 25 km or so today, and as you round the Hungry Bend, you'll see the same interesting erosion patterns in the steep banks as you saw yesterday downstream of Etna's Landing. These wedge-shaped structures are simply rock left between rills or gullies. They are a sign of water erosion on sandstone, and only occur on a steep enough slope.

As you paddle toward the “elbow” in today's bends (~384 km), you can choose which way to go around Island 2. Even at low water levels (~400 m<sup>3</sup>/s), it was carefully navigable on both sides, and quite picturesque if you choose to go between the islands (to the right of Island 2). Notice how some of these islands have very steep, eroded banks. These islands are quite different from the depositional ones you've been seeing.

Around 383 km, a watchful eye will see a trail on the left shore (D24P02). This leads to a huge network of trails that are used for all-terrain vehicles in the summer and snowmobiling in the

winter. It connects to a diagonal trail about 40 km long, which runs from the north bank of the river to Hwy 35.



After the river curves to the north (left) again, you'll paddle past Oliver's Island. This island was logged by Mr. Oliver in the early 1900's and the logs floated downstream to build the steamboat *S.S. Peace River* in Fort Vermilion, as well as build the store and lumber mill. In the 1940's, a pioneer family, the Wards, harvested hay on this island. The bank is steep and sandy; there isn't any way to camp up on the island, except at the downstream end.

The next bend you are heading around is Gooseneck Point. The banks are quite steep on the right, until you round the point. As

you do, watch for a road/trail leading up the bank (on the right). This is an absolutely beautiful road through the forest, so if you have time, why not go for a walk; you could also camp along this trail. The eastern half of Gooseneck Point is also called Wiebe's flats, after the Wiebe family. After you round the point, you'll see high banks on the left, and sandstone peeking between the trees.

Continue paddling around the point and there's only one more to go – Prairie Point. Although there used to be a landing at the southwest “corner” of the point, where river boats would stop, no trail or landing can be seen easily from the river any more. An early pioneer family, the Lawrences, pastured cattle on the point in the early 1900's, and Jim Lawrence had a farmstead, sawmill, and cattle yard near the landing. You'll learn more about the Lawrences tomorrow (in guide #25). Other families farmed on Prairie Point too, including the Rose family (Hilda and “Daddy”), and to this day, there is one family still living on the point. Watch for a sandbar and an island on the right of the curve – some call it Prairie Point Island, but a youth group which paddles the river each year calls it “Bird Turd Island.” Along river right, around 401 km is Ward's Landing (river right). Remember the Wards, who hayed Oliver's Island in the 1940's? This was their landing (it's tricky to see). George and Elizabeth Ward moved to a nearby section of land in 1919 with just a few head of cattle and horses.

If you started in the town of Peace River, feel free to do a carefully-controlled dance-of-joy at paddling over 400 km! Pat



yourself on the back!

Notice that the high banks are back on the right. They will stay for another 15 km or so before decreasing. Along this bank, you'll see a fancy-looking house perched on the cliff around 405 km (D24P04). This is a hunting lodge, specializing in Canada Goose hunting. The season for geese starts September 1, and many tourists come from far and wide to hunt the birds, some of which are cooked and eaten. The geese flock not only to the islands along the river but also to get their fill from nearby grain fields. There are actually two competing lodges up on that bank, but only one is visible from the river.

***Peace River Paddling Guide***

Don't forget to appreciate the beautiful, steep-banked braided islands on the left as you paddle the last 4 km today — you can see how erosion has shaped them.

Today's destination is coming up on river right – Wieler's Landing, also known historically as Flett's Landing or MacDonald's Landing (see photo below). The Wieler family farms the land nearby. You'll see the boat launch and the camp sites to the left (downstream) of the launch. This is an informal recreation site – no



one in particular maintains it – and there are only 2 or 3 spots to camp. The road goes quite far down, towards Big Island, but the best camp spots are close to the boat launch. This is a rocky shore – you shouldn't have any trouble finding a rock big enough to tie your boat to.





## START – Aspin House Area

Nearest Community with Postal Code	La Crete, AB T0H 2H0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	697
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	N/A
Parking Instructions at Site	N/A
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0521179 Northing 6455148
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	58° 14.217' N 116° 38.359' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	253 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Gradual up to a flat

## END – Wieler's Landing

Nearest Community with Postal Code	La Crete T0H 2H0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	697
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	Turn west onto Twp Rd 1074. Drive 9 km. Turn right onto gravel road and follow it about 700 m to the boat launch and camping area.
Parking Instructions at Site	Standard campsite parking
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting Point	11V Easting 0537522 Northing 6464206
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	58° 19.033' N 116° 21.572' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m

Altitude of Site in meters	254 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Medium-steep slope up to plateau

## Waypoints

D24P01 (possible campsite): 58° 16.068' N 116° 37.402' W / 11V

Easting 0522096 Northing 6458588 / elev 260 m

D24P02 (trail): 58° 16.508' N 116° 34.387' W / 11V Easting

0525038 Northing 6459420

D24P03 (Gooseneck Point): 58° 18.221' N 116° 30.718' W / 11V

Easting 0528603 Northing 6462625 / elev 256 m

D24P04 (hunting lodges): 58° 17.227' N 116° 23.195' W / 11V

Easting 0535967 Northing 6460840

**D24P05 (end point):** 58° 19.033' N 116° 21.572' W / 11V Easting

0537521 Northing 6464206 / elev 254 m

## Possible Campsites

- Along Island 2 at about 380 km. Take the channel to the right of the island and go about 1 km (D24P01). It's a very sandy island — set your tents farther from shore near the young willows.
- At the downstream end of Oliver's Island, river left.
- Gooseneck Point, about 389 km. Watch for the shallowness on river right, and come ashore when you see a trail (waypoint D24P03). You can camp in a small clearing up the trail or even

on the trail.

- Prairie Point. There are camping possibilities along the point, once the high bank ends.
- Bird Turd Island. Just watch your step!

Erosion on the tip of an island

Wieler's Landing (at relatively low water)

## **Emergency Road Access**

The trail on river left at 383 km (D24P02) doesn't lead anywhere helpful. The trail at Gooseneck Point (D24P03) leads to Wiebe's flat and eventually to a road. You can look for the landing at Prairie Point, which leads to Prairie Point Road (395 km). Wieler's Landing has good road access: it's only 700 m up the gravel road to Twp Rd 1074.

## **Bibliography**

*The Mighty Peace – Carcajou to the Fifth Meridian*, brochure published by the Heritage Committee, Fort Vermilion Agricultural Society

## **Images**

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

Oliver's Island

***Peace River Paddling Guide***



# Peace River Guide

## Map 25

Boyer

Boyer River Indian Reserve

River

Buttertown  
(North  
Vermilion)

Stoney Point

Fort  
Vermilion

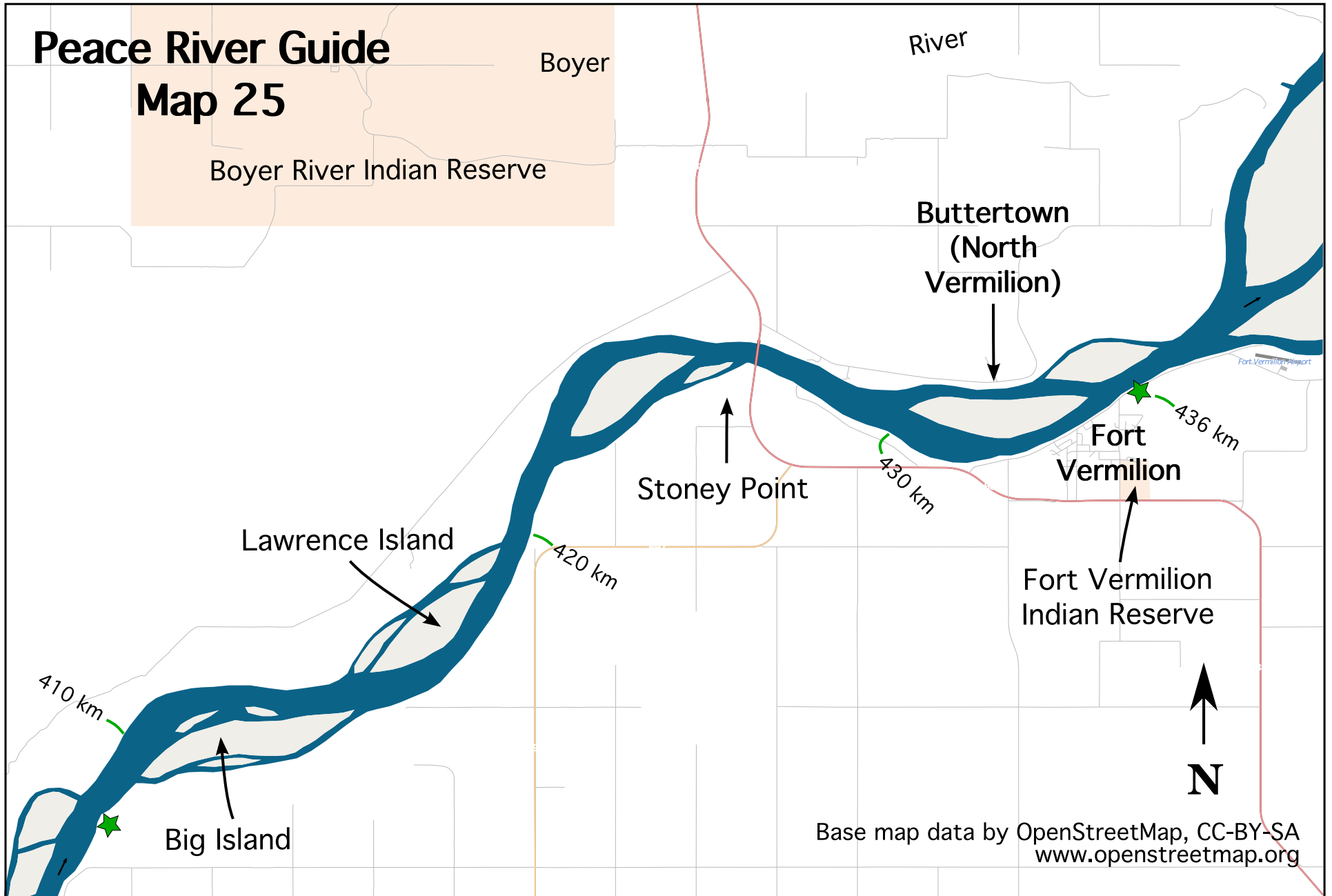
Fort Vermilion  
Indian Reserve

Lawrence Island

Big Island



Base map data by OpenStreetMap, CC-BY-SA  
[www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org)



## Guide 25

### Wieler's Landing to Fort Vermilion

Name of River Section	Wieler's Landing to Fort Vermilion	
Paddling Time	3 – 6 hrs	
Paddling Distance	28 km (408 – 436 km)	[784 – 812 km]
Rapids (Class number)	Class I – no rapids	
Portage	none	
Typical speed of current on this section	3-5 km/hr	
Mobile (cellular) telephone access	none	
Appeal to Families & Children	This is a lovely and easy day trip if you're looking for something new with a little adventure and history!	
Appeal to People with passion for topic	This reach is a nice, short paddle ending at one of Alberta's oldest communities.	
Scenic Appeal of River Section	★★★★★	
Possible as a day-trip?	Yes	
NTS maps required for this section	84 K (K/8)	

Savour your last day paddling the beautiful Peace River. Today is a short day of paddling, only 26 km, approaching one of Alberta's oldest communities – so rich in history.

First, the practical elements. Be extra vigilant on the last day of paddling to be safe. It is a temptation sometimes to bypass the methods and routines that have been keeping you safe, but please

don't. Take your time and do everything the safest way you can, as you have been, and remember to pay attention to the river – don't allow yourself to get distracted by thoughts of showers, french fries or fresh fruit!



The first island you'll pass has been unimaginatively named “Big Island.” You'll paddle about 5 km to pass it. There are, as you might guess, shallow areas along its upstream side. Farther down, you'll see a small island – let's call it “Small Island” – beside Big Island which has sheer eroded banks, with trees falling off the undercut bank.

The next island you pass, Lawrence Island, is on the left. On



the left bank beyond the island is the location of the Sheridan Lawrence Ranch, a well-known historically successful farm and ranch. Sheridan Lawrence wasn't the first Lawrence to come to this land however.

Erastus and Lydia Lawrence arrived in the Fort Vermilion area from Sorel, Quebec, in 1879, having been asked by Rev. Alfred Garrioch to set up an Anglican Mission school and farm. There was already a Roman Catholic mission there, St. Henri's, having been established in 1866. The Lawrences arrived via the Athabasca River, Fort McMurray, Fort Chipewyan and then upstream on the Peace River. Most other homesteaders came downstream from Peace River Crossing (the town of Peace River). They established the mission farm about 3 km downstream of the present location of Fort Vermilion and there created a very successful school, flour mill and farm. They named the school the Irene Training School – Irene as a Greek name means “peace.”

Two of Erastus' brothers, Henry and Isaac, moved to Fort Vermilion in 1885 and 1886 respectively. Isaac and his family soon returned to eastern Canada, but Henry stayed. He and his wife Margaret established a farm along this reach of the river in 1888, along Lawrence Island. By 1898, over 3,000 acres were in cultivation – a very large farm for the time! Although Henry moved to Manitoba in 1901, Sheridan, Henry's eldest son, took over the ranch and it continued to prosper. Besides ranching, they also had a grist (flour) mill, sawmill, and thresher, and even a school. By

1890, the Henry (Sheridan) Lawrence Ranch was the biggest in the district.

From the first garden at Boyer's Post in 1788-89, it was clear that agriculture would have a large part to play in the development of this area. Everyone who settled here grew a garden. By the 1890's, the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) and Roman Catholic mission joined the Anglican mission, the Lawrences and others in exporting what they grew. Produce was shipped all along the Peace, and bread – baked from wheat grown in the area and then milled into flour at the local grist mills – was even shipped down the Mackenzie and up the Athabasca River.

One boat used for shipping produce and bread was the *S.S. St. Charles*, the first steamboat on the Peace, built by the Oblate missionaries in Peace River in 1903, providing service between Fort Vermilion and Peace River Crossing. Although the HBC's boat *S.S. Graham* provided service below (east of) the Vermilion Chutes, the company realized the need for something larger. In 1905, the first large steamboat, the *S.S. Peace River*, was built in Fort Vermilion by boatbuilders hired by the HBC. Wood for the boat was logged from Oliver's Island and the steam engine was brought down the river from Peace River Crossing. Subsequent boats were built in Peace River Crossing.

Around 420 km, you'll pass under some high voltage power lines. Within about 1.5 km, if you watch carefully, you'll see Jones' Landing on the right, named after the man who ran the experimental

farm near here for many years.

As you round the next bend, you'll be rounding Stoney Point. Farming was key to Fort Vermilion's early success and its crop capacity deserved to be studied. It seemed that the northerly location provided long days in summer, and combined with the fertile soil, resulted in excellent crops. In 1908, the Experimental Farm was started at Stoney Point. Fred Lawrence, one of Erastus' sons, started the farm, bringing over 700 different shrubs to grow as well as innumerable seeds. After the first year, Robert Jones ran the farm. Jones later had the farm moved to its present location, just west of Fort Vermilion. Stoney Point, incidentally, is the farthest north you will paddle on this trip – check your GPS coordinates! Also, about halfway down the large island on the right bend, you'll pass the **800-km mark**, if you started at Hudson's Hope! Now

that's something to brag about!

Soon, you'll be able to see the Fort Vermilion bridge (D25P01). It was built from 1971-1974 and replaced the ferry service that operated downstream of the bridge. After you pass under the bridge, you'll see the ferry landings on either shore, about 1 km downstream. There were several ferries over the years, including a cable ferry which had a tower for the cable on the island between Fort Vermilion and Buttertown. People had to cross the ferry to the island and then a second ferry across the other channel. You'll probably get very excited when you see the bridge and feel like Fort Vermilion is so close you can taste it, but you still have 9 km to go from the bridge to the dock.

The Fort Vermilion Provincial Recreation Area (also called the Fort Vermilion Bridge Campground) is on the left bank just after the bridge. There is free



camping there, along with fire pits, firewood, and potable water. There is a trail to the campground just under the bridge (downstream side), requiring about 300 m of walking.

After the bridge, you'll be able to see the hamlet of Fort Vermilion on the bank on the right. Watch for a unique welcome sign facing the river (D25P02). There's a trail there, if you choose to land here, or you can continue 2 km to the dock and boat landing, which will give you better footing.

The Hudson Bay Company had a large part to play in the development of Fort Vermilion. Although the Northwest Company was first to have fur trade posts along the river this far west, in 1821, the two companies merged and the Northwest posts became HBC posts. Circa 1830, the HBC moved its operations from La Fleur's Post (see guide #22) to the present location of Fort Vermilion, which was named after red rock in the area. The HBC enjoyed a monopoly on the fur trade – almost. There were many free traders, including Twelve Foot Davis who had posts ranging from Hudson's Hope to Fort Vermilion. Although Davis died in 1900, competition continued in the form of Bredin and Cornwall, who built their post on the north side of the Peace opposite Fort Vermilion, in what is known as Buttertown. There was a settlement there, with slender river lots and plenty of cows – butter was the main export (hence the name). Revillon Freres also had a post in Buttertown. But the HBC endured, and the house built for the factor (company agent) in 1908 remains, and has been undergoing



restoration since 2005. Watch for a striking mustard-yellow house (the historical colour) as you paddle by Fort Vermilion, downstream of the welcome sign (the house is located at D25P03).

If you see planes or helicopters flying over the river in this area, that's because the airport is just east of the village (about 2 km downstream from the dock). Long before there was an airport, Fort Vermilion was the site of a history-making flight to save a nearby native reserve from a diphtheria outbreak. In December 1928, Bert Logan, an HBC employee, got sick with diphtheria upon returning to his post at Little Red River (about 88 km downstream). His wife, a nurse, had received a trunk of clothes to give to the native children that was unintentionally laced with the illness. She had

been vaccinated, but he had not. She recognized his illness and the need to get everyone in the community inoculated before it spread. William and Bobby Gray left immediately to fetch Dr. Hamman from Fort Vermilion. It was a two-day trip via dogsled from Little Red River to Fort Vermilion over the river ice. Dr. Hamman returned via dog sled and confirmed that Logan had diphtheria. He sent the Grays back to Fort Vermilion with a message for the Department of Health in Edmonton. Since there was no telegraph line to Fort Vermilion yet, someone needed to travel overland to Peace River to the telegraph office there. Joe (Dollar) LaFleur and William Lambert, both considered experienced river men, departed on December 18 by dogsled to travel the frozen river. Shortly after, Joe fell through the ice and they had to return to Fort Vermilion. They departed again on the 21<sup>st</sup>, and made it all the way to Peace River in eight days of travelling in frigid temperatures – -40's to -50's. Both were hospitalized in Peace River upon arrival. The message was telegraphed to Edmonton, and experienced pilot Wop May volunteered to deliver the medicine. In frigid cold on January 2, 1929, he and another flying club member, Vic Horner, left Edmonton in an Avro Avian, an open-cockpit biplane, to fly to Fort Vermilion. They had a charcoal burner at their feet to keep the serum from freezing. The burner caught fire once so they stopped using it, instead putting the serum in their clothing to keep it warm. They battled low cloud, icing and snow. They landed in McLennan that night and refueled in Peace River the next day. They landed on the frozen river in Fort Vermilion at 3 pm that afternoon. Dr.

Hamman, in many ways the unsung hero, met the plane and took the medicine by dog sled back to Little Red River. Although the original man who had contracted the disease passed away, no one else died. Wop and Vic, after some flight difficulties, arrived back in Edmonton on January 6 to a hero's welcome.

Take a peek at your GPS display, and notice that you're approaching 116° 00' W; you'll pass into 116° W just after you pass the Old Bay House. Soon you'll see the end of the island on the left, and the dock on river right (D25P04). This is the end point of your journey! Feel free to marvel for a moment at how far you've come. There are a few restaurants in town, including “The Trapper's Shack,” a lovely old log cabin with dove-tailed corners built circa 1908. There is also a Northern Store to resupply you, a bank, gas station, hospital and other general amenities. The nearest camping is at the Fantasy North Golf Course (D25P05), about 1.5 km from the dock. You can visit the Lean-To Museum, at the Heritage Centre, up the bank on 50th street, where the friendly staff can give you a map to visit 33 historic sites.

### **Additional Notes:**

If you are continuing your paddling trip on the Peace River, you must be aware of the chutes (waterfalls) located approximately 75 km downstream! Do not attempt to run the chutes! After the Wabasca River mouth, stay right of Donnelly Island (the first large island), follow the right shore and watch for a portage trail. Please



read the paddling guide published by the Wood Buffalo National Park, available by searching “canoeing Wood Buffalo National Park.”

## START – Wieler's Landing

Nearest Community with Postal Code	La Crete T0H 2H0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	La Crete, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	697
Turn by turn directions from Primary Highway	Turn west onto Twp Rd 1074. Drive 9 km. Turn right onto gravel road and follow it about 700 m to the boat launch and camping area.
Parking Instructions at Site	Standard campsite parking
Ownership of Site	Crown
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Starting Point	11V Easting 0537522 Northing 6464206
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Starting Point	58° 19.033' N 116° 21.572' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	254 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Medium-steep slope up to plateau

## END – Fort Vermilion

Nearest Community with Postal Code	Fort Vermilion, AB T0H 1N0
Nearest Community with a Tourist Booth (VIC)	Fort Vermilion, AB
County or Municipal District	Mackenzie County
Nearest Primary Highway	88
Turn by turn directions from	Take the first exit from Hwy 58 into Fort Vermilion.

## Peace River Paddling Guide

Primary Highway	Follow this road, River Road, for about 4 km, until you see signs for the boat launch on the left.
Parking Instructions at Site	Park out of others' way
Ownership of Site	Mackenzie County
Access to Site (when open/accessible)	Year round
UTM Coordinates of Ending Point	11V Easting 0558909 Northing 6473748
Latitude & Longitude Coordinates of Ending Point	58° 24.033' N 115° 59.525' W
Accuracy of site coordinates	5 m
Altitude of Site in meters	247 m
Describe Terrain from River to Site	Medium steep slope

## Waypoints

D25P01 (bridge): 58° 24.255' N 116° 7.709' W / 11V Easting 0550932 Northing 6474049

D25P02 (welcome sign): 58° 23.392' N 116° 1.455' W / 11V Easting 0557047 Northing 6472530

D25P03 (Bay House): 58° 23.789' N 116° 0.132' W / 11V Easting 0558325 Northing 6473285

**D25P04 (end point):** 58° 24.033' N 115° 59.525' W / 11V Easting 0558909 Northing 6473748 / elev 247 m

D25P05 (golf course): 58° 23.548' N 116° 0.306' W / 11V Easting 0558161 Northing 6472835

## Possible Campsites

- Fort Vermilion Recreation Area, also known as Fort Vermilion Bridge Campground. About 100 m downstream of the bridge,



river left. Look for a small trail almost under the bridge that leads to the campground.

- Fantasy North Golf Course in Fort Vermilion, about 1.4 km from the dock. Walk back (upstream) along River Road (the road that follows the river) about 800 m, and then turn left (south) after the Old Bay House and follow the road another 600 m uphill.

## **Emergency Road Access**

Around 420 km, you could walk up the power line cutline on the right shore to the road nearby (Hwy 697). The bridge provides access to Hwy 88. The next access is the ferry landing on river right, or the hamlet itself, by the welcome sign (D25P02).

## **Bibliography**

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[http://www.abheritage.ca/pasttopresent/en/rural\\_life/124\\_Lawrence\\_Ranch.html](http://www.abheritage.ca/pasttopresent/en/rural_life/124_Lawrence_Ranch.html)

*The Mighty Peace – Carcajou to the Fifth Meridian*, brochure published by the Heritage Committee Fort Vermilion Agricultural

Society

*Alberta Doctor's Digest, Jan/Feb 2004, Volume 24 No. 1* Published by the Alberta Medical Association, 2004

## **Images**

(All photos by Teresa Griffith)

Trees falling off the edge of a small island

Approaching Fort Vermilion

The Old Bay House, still sitting exactly where it was built over 109 years ago.